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ABSTRACT

This book contains eight case studies of critical literacy in action in Victoria, Australia. The following papers are included: "Preface" (John Dewar Wilson); "Introduction" (Delia Bradshaw); "Making the Time and Space for Critical Literacy: Why Bother?" (Barbara Comber); "Questioning Text: Critical Literacy in an ALBE Classroom' (Fran O'Neill); "Critical Literacy and Numeracy in the Print Industry" (Helena Spyrou, Ivan Parrett); "Fairy Stories and Critical Literacy" (Clara Brack); "Developing Critical Writing Practices in a Community Education Setting" (Barbara Kamler); "'We Have To Learn to Say Things Very Clearly...'" (Michele Lucas); "Modelling Critical Literacy in Teacher Education" (Beverley Campbell); and "'Despite All My Rage, I'm Still a Rat in a Cage'" (Ray Misson). Among the topics discussed in the individual papers are the following: relationship between language use and power; workplace-related functional literacy; literacy as social practice; use of community texts; classroom literacy practice; critical questioning and writing; development of political and collective purposes for writing; interaction of students and teachers in literacy classrooms; techniques for encouraging students to "read between the lines"; conceptual development; text and context; critical writing. (MN)

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ADULT
LITERACY
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Knowledge of Texts:

theory and practice in critical literacy

edited by
Delia Bradshaw

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Knowledge of Texts:

theory and practice in critical literacy

Edited by Delia Bradshaw

LANGUAGE
AUSTRALIA
The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia

The development of this publication was made possible with funding from the Adult Literacy Research Network Node for Victoria (ALRNNV). The project was managed by ALRNNV co-ordinator, Beverley Campbell. Special thanks to all who contributed to the project, and to Language Australia staff.

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Preface

The Adult Literacy Research Network Node for Victoria (ALRNNV) was established in 1993 with funding from Language Australia (formerly National Languages and Literacy Institute, NLLIA). ALRNNV was established as part of a consortium, consisting of Victoria University of Technology, Western Melbourne Institute of TAFE and Kangan Batman Institute of TAFE. It is pleasing to note that this management arrangement still exists in a very productive way four years later. ALRNNV is part of a national network aimed at the promotion of research into adult literacy education and professional development of Adult Literacy and Basic Education personnel. *Knowledge of Texts: theory and practice in critical literacy* is ALRNNV's third publication; it follows *Negotiating Competence* (Sanguinetti, 1995) and *Practice in Reading Values* (Delia Bradshaw, Ed, 1995), both important records of adult literacy educational practice in the 1990s.

In 1995 a group of adult literacy teachers interested in critical literacy practice met in Melbourne to discuss academic papers about critical literacy and to consider the implications for their practice. Some members of that original group are contributors to this collection. The group asked ALRNNV for support, and in the ensuing months ALRNNV was represented at the meetings. As well as discussing critical literacy pedagogy and practice, each member of the group agreed to work towards writing a paper documenting some aspect of their practice. The idea of a seminar on critical literacy also had its origins in this group. This seminar, *Critical Literacy: Linking Theory to Practice* was jointly organised by ALRNNV, Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC), and members of the special interest group. It was held on 17 May, 1996.

It was intended that this publication include the three plenary speakers' presentations, contributions written by workshop presenters, as well as other reflections on practice. For a variety of reasons this plan has had to be modified. Teachers' written reflections on their practice proved difficult to collect. Current industrial conditions often work against adult literacy teachers engaging in projects such as this. Teachers see themselves primarily as practitioners; the time and space for the sort of professional development that can occur through documenting reflective practice is increasingly difficult to justify. In the course of a year some members of the special interest group moved to other jobs in the sector, others were victims of the increasing casualization of the workforce and yet others moved into others areas of professional interest. The commitment of Delia Bradshaw and Beverley Campbell has finally brought the project to fruition.

Knowledge of Texts: theory and practice in critical literacy represents an important collection of papers about the theory and practice of critical literacy. ALRNNV congratulates all contributors. We are especially grateful to Delia Bradshaw, acting as editor, and for her forbearance throughout the project. Finally we thank Language Australia for publishing the volume.

Professor John Dewar Wilson
Director
Adult Literacy Research Network Node for Victoria
Department of Education
Victoria University of Technology
Melbourne

Introduction

Delia Bradshaw
Editor

For the authors in this collection 'theory' and 'practice' are not separate, unrelated, oppositional entities. Quite the reverse. All the writers here see the relationship between theory and practice as a closely connected and mutually beneficial one. Theory is embedded in practice. Practice is theory in action. Practice is made articulate by theory. Each shapes and fortifies the other.

This is not to say, however, that there are not fundamental differences between different kinds of theories and different kinds of practices. A close reading of the texts included here reveals how both theory and practice are particular ways of representing the world, of telling stories about the way the world is or the way the world should be. As each of these authors demonstrates, every instance of theory and every instance of practice is a values statement, a unique blend of embodied interests and ideologies.

This interdependence of theory and practice, the way they work together to reinforce certain narratives and certain points of view, is not always clearly evident in the texts we read and write. As expressions of ideologies, different theories justify and promote different practices just as different practices call on certain theories to provide a rationale. But more often implicitly than explicitly. Making these textual and ideological inter-connections explicit, examining the relationship between language and power, is what many would call the work of 'critical literacy'.

This book, a series of case studies of critical literacy in action, can be thought of as a sustained discussion about how texts work and in whose interests they work. It contains examples of the different ways in which teachers and students scrutinise the oftentimes taken-for-granted nature of texts. It shows how they identify and question the way theory and practice work together in texts to reinforce particular purposes and priorities. In other words, this book about knowledge of texts is about how critical literacy works.

Critical literacy means many things to many people. It is generally considered that a generic critical literacy is both impossible and undesirable. Nonetheless, in the wide array of contexts in which this term is found, some common elements can be identified. They might be summarised, rather crudely, in the following way:

· No text is neutral, each utterance being a statement favouring, opposing, or concealing particular positions;
· Given this in-built bias, questions need to be asked about the reasons behind the production of texts, about the representations of the world constructed by them and about the ideologies they are advocating or concealing;
· An analysis of texts is not only about asking questions to do with who, what, how and why but also about identifying the cumulative narratives being built up that serve particular (often very powerful) interests;
· As texts work in the world to get certain things done, they have different effects on different people;
· Critical literacy is not an abstract exercise: its aim is to integrate critical literacy practices into everyday living and working;
· This said, it is not a cure-all for society's ills. Critical literacy can make a difference but not all the difference.

The articles presented here demonstrate many of these features of critical literacy in action. There is considerable variety in how this is done – variety in approach, in focus, in emphasis, in location and in the timespan covered. Accounts range from a close-up of a discussion in one class to activities that constitute a whole semester. They take place in school, community, TAFE, university and workplace settings.

Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of this publication on critical literacy, however, is the way it dissolves many conventional boundaries, borders between adult education and school literacy practices, between theory and practice, between academic and practitioner, between action and reflection, between argument and storytelling. This blending of what is often kept separate makes this collection noteworthy, a striking illustration of the power of fusions in studying any topic, critical literacy included.

As an introduction to the tone as well as the content of the voices to be found in this publication, the following summaries deliberately draw on the author's own words.

Barbara Comber opens this collection by asking some fundamental questions: 'Why bother? Why make the time and space for critical literacy?'. She describes the pressures inherent in the current context of teachers' work, sitting as it does at the intersection of competing and often contradictory discourses and imperatives. She stresses the importance in this situation of adult literacy educators practising critical analysis on all the texts that shape everyday work contexts. She presents and explores a number of examples of critical literacy in action, both inside and outside the classroom.

Fran O'Neill follows with a detailed description and justification of critical literacy in her adult literacy and basic education classroom practice. She is concerned to move students beyond their obsession with words towards an understanding of the construction of meaning. She outlines an activity with a newspaper article in which, through a process of questioning, students identify their own political positions as well as the textual devices that are positioning them. She outlines how this analysis enables them to then go on to author their own texts.

In the next article, Helena Spyrou and Ivan Parrett describe a literacy/numeracy course that they jointly taught in the print industry. It details the approach they took to encourage critical literacy amongst the students in their workplace basic education classes. They demonstrate how graphs, a major focus of their teaching with these groups, are viewed as texts to be investigated and debated. They also explain how visual representations in general can generate discussions, stories and a wide range of other critical literacy activities. The activities they describe argue strongly against narrow, fixed, pre-determined 'training' programs that restrict opportunities for critical analysis and workplace participation.

Clara Brack also provides a richly textured account of critical literacy work in the classroom. Focussing on fairy stories, and Red Riding Hood in particular, she relates how students discover and discuss the different readings and different meanings available in such often taken-for-granted texts. She considers different versions of the Red Riding Hood story as well as the different illustrations that have accompanied them over time. She notes how unsettling this process can be for students accustomed to the idea of 'one right answer'.

Barbara Kamler turns our attention to developing critical writing practices, and specifically, to the importance of relocating personal writing within a critical literacy framework. She asks what does it mean to 'voice' in a culturally critical way? She describes her work with women from 60 to 90 in community settings to produce 'stories of ageing'. The political and collective purposes of this project are clearly articulated as aiming to disrupt negative and limited storylines of ageing. She presents the pedagogical processes, and three women's stories in particular, to illustrate how the personal can be framed critically by being situated within larger social and cultural constructs.

Michele Lucas reminds us that students bring to the classroom considerable experience of enacting critical literacy. She provides a transcript of a discussion on women and health from a Return to Study class. This shows how well students understand the way language works. They know that control over discourse is what gives power.

Beverley Campbell refers to a semester long course offered as part of a Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma in Adult Literacy and Basic Education. She points out how teacher education courses create the context to model practice which, in turn, can be used to theorise classroom pedagogy and effective models of teaching and learning. She presents some of the concepts – critical literacy, intertextuality, conceptual development, text and context, discourse and habitus – which frame this course. She describes how she uses a wide variety of texts, including newspaper articles, academic papers, prints of paintings and children's stories, to elucidate these concepts. She concludes with a few words of caution about some of the pitfalls of developing a critical approach to literacy.

Ray Misson elaborates more on the limits of critical literacy. By 'limits', he doesn't mean 'limitations'. He believes it is very important to define exactly what one can expect to achieve and what one cannot. He exemplifies what he means by looking at the written work of three students followed by a reflection on the teachers of each of the same three students. Whilst stating that critical literacy is not a universal panacea, he does think that teachers can model ways of going about understanding society that lead to more careful decision-making about what beliefs to reject and what to accept. He concludes by saying that, despite its limits, critical literacy is still our best chance to get out of some of the cages we all inhabit, thus ending the book on a cautiously optimistic note.

It is also with optimism that I conclude the introduction to this passionate, powerful and unprecedented collection of writings on critical literacy in action. Long may 'Knowledge of Texts' strengthen the connections between education and everyday life!

December, 1997.

Editor's Note:
The bibliographic conventions within each article, while internally consistent, vary from contribution to contribution. This decision was made out of respect for each author's preferences. The References section has been standardised.

Making the Time and Space for Critical Literacy: Why Bother?

Barbara Comber
University of South Australia

Introduction

It's very much worth making the time and space for critical literacies at this historic moment. Given the ways in which some recent government policies and workplace training reforms have constructed literacy as a commodity or as a set of competencies necessary for economic growth, it is crucial that educators maintain an analysis of literacy which recognises the relationships between language use and power. This ongoing analysis is central to any project we might describe as 'critical literacy'. In this paper, I want to do two main things: to think about the context of teachers' work and to explore some examples of critical literacy in action. My view is that there is no generic critical literacy that you're going to get here today, or any other time, but that there is a need for us to work on our own critical reading and writing practices in the everyday contexts in which we work.

Literacy pedagogy and teachers' work

I am interested in the competing discourses and conditions which impinge on teachers' thinking and their work. Figure 1 below, 'I will teach', is taken from a guide to grammar for student teachers (Fox & Wilkinson 1993, reprinted with permission). The other side of the page deals with the past tense, 'I have taught'. I leave it to you to imagine the way the teacher is portrayed there.

The emblematic buzz words signalling various discourses come together at a particular time and place and sometimes have unanticipated effects on the work of literacy teachers. For example, in a disadvantaged school setting, such as the school where I

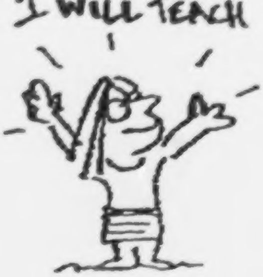


Figure 1: 'I will teach'.

worked, behaviour management, standards, social justice, critical literacy, empowerment, genre, individuality, quality and so on competed for space on teachers' agendas (see Figure 2). In an adult literacy setting, key discourses might be managerial, economic and political, with the associated vocabularies of competencies, workplace reform, retraining, multi-skilling, alongside liberation, equity and so on. Teachers juggle the implications of social justice policies at the same time as they respond to demands for increased accountability for student outcomes. Somehow teachers must hold all this together and out of these contradictions design and deliver a literacy program.

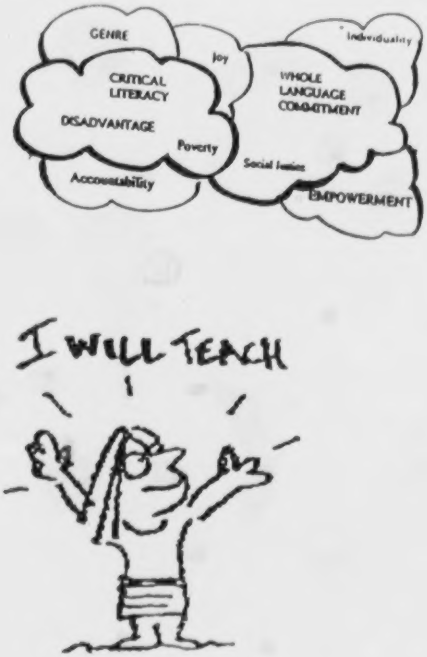


Figure 2: Competing discourses and teachers' work.

The dominant words of policy actually make a difference to our institutional work: to the time we have to do things, to what counts as literacy, to the ways we see students, to the ways we assess students. In a whole language program, for example, you might assess different literate practices than in a genre program. These different formations of literacy constitute different students who are assessed for different competencies, attitudes and products. In effect, you're assessing different kinds of literacies.

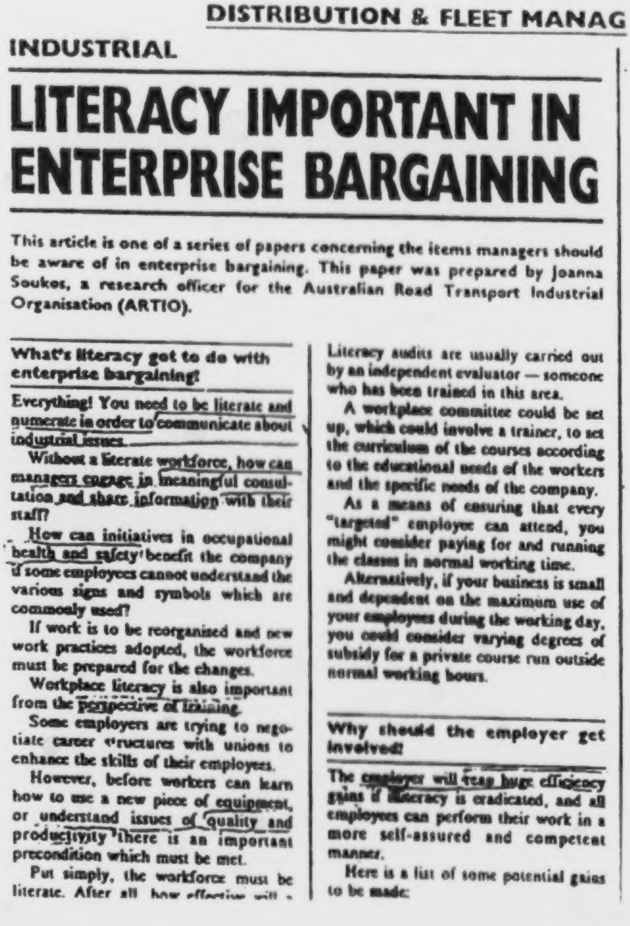
The adult literacy workplace

In the adult literacy workplace, the competing demands may depend very much on the specific context. For example, what kinds of discourses might impinge on the literacy lessons to be taught and learned in a class for transport workers? What might be key words for you and your co-workers? In considering the ways in which literacy education is subject to broader societal discourses and institutional practices in adult literacy, it may help to refer to an example (see Figure 3. 'Literacy important in enterprise bargaining' (Soukos 1993:30) below). I found this article in a management magazine for transport operators. It illustrates how 'literacy' is being made important in one workplace context.

I don't presume that the effects of such a construction of literacy are sinister. The recognition that literacy makes a difference to workers' participation and access to training is an important positive step for those whose childhood and school careers have not provided access to the literate practices needed for ongoing lifelong independent learning. However, such constructions of literacy do have effects which, as teachers, we need to be aware of, to question and to make decisions about. What arguments are made here for the effects of literacy? What are these managers being told literacy will do for them? The writer of the article makes a number of promises about literacy. She suggests that improved literacy will:

- help managers communicate about industrial issues
- help managers with issues of health and safety in work environments
- be useful for training and award restructuring
- help with quality and productivity
- give workers basic skills.
- generate huge efficiency gains
- enable electronic data interchange
- ensure workers have information, knowledge and skills
- benefit customers.

And if this is not enough, the writer suggests that there'll be 'fewer disruptions' and that 'embarrassing interpersonal problems within the workplace can be reduced.' It is assumed the reader knows the kinds of embarrassing interpersonal problems and disruptions which may be alleviated by increased literacy in the workplace. These are substantial claims and within them particular kinds of literacies and workers are implied. The improvement of workers' literacies is assumed to directly translate into benefits for managers and customers. Providing workers with basic literacy skills is constructed as a worthwhile investment which will reap measurable rewards. It is important to ask about these basic literacy skills: in whose interests are they? It is also interesting to anticipate the kinds of workplace literacies likely to result from such a selling of literacy.



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LITERACY IMPORTANT IN ENTERPRISE BARGAINING

This article is one of a series of papers concerning the items managers should be aware of in enterprise bargaining. This paper was prepared by Joanna Soukos, a research officer for the Australian Road Transport Industrial Organisation (ARTIO).

What's literacy got to do with enterprise bargaining?

Everything! You need to be literate and numerate in order to communicate about industrial issues.

Without a literate workforce, how can managers engage in meaningful consultation and share information with their staff?

How can initiatives in occupational health and safety benefit the company if some employees cannot understand the various signs and symbols which are commonly used?

If work is to be reorganised and new work practices adopted, the workforce must be prepared for the changes.

Workplace literacy is also important from the perspective of training.

Some employers are trying to negotiate career structures with unions to enhance the skills of their employees.

However, before workers can learn how to use a new piece of equipment, or understand issues of quality and productivity there is an important precondition which must be met.

Put simply, the workforce must be literate. After all how effective will a

Literacy audits are usually carried out by an independent evaluator — someone who has been trained in this area.

A workplace committee could be set up, which could involve a trainer, to set the curriculum of the courses according to the educational needs of the workers and the specific needs of the company.

As a means of ensuring that every "targeted" employee can attend, you might consider paying for and running the classes in normal working time.

Alternatively, if your business is small and dependent on the maximum use of your employees during the working day, you could consider varying degrees of subsidy for a private course run outside normal working hours.

Why should the employer get involved?

The employer will reap huge efficiency gains if illiteracy is eradicated, and all employees can perform their work in a more self-assured and competent manner.

Here is a list of some potential gains to be made:

Figure 3: 'Literacy important in enterprise bargaining'.

Now I am not saying that promoting literacy in this way is all bad, but that there may be unanticipated pedagogical effects in constituting literacy in such a way. On the positive side, if the writer is convincing, managers may be encouraged to set aside funds for literacy education for their workers. This may provide access to critical competencies that may otherwise have been denied. However, such a formation of literacy is not without its risks and effects on how literacy educators spend their time. I argue that we need to look at the claims made for literacy here and the kinds of literacy that are being talked about. As literacy educators, we can take up positions as critical readers and ask:

How and why does literacy become a focus here?
Which literacies are talked about when literacy is made important in enterprise bargaining?
Which literacies are excluded?
How is the ideal literate worker constituted?
How do such constructions of literacy make a difference to our work?
What space and time might be available for critical literacy in such a workplace?

For literacy teachers, immediate and daily questions surround the need to juggle demands emerging from economic and managerial discourses for productivity, raised competencies and flexible workers, and oftentimes contradictory demands from educational discourses for empowerment, critical literacy and so on. How can and should we put this stuff together? Where, why and how, under these conditions, can literacy educators (who are themselves often employed under tenuous labour conditions, involving short-term contracts) begin to explore a critical literacy curriculum?

Teachers' own literate practices

I argue that a first step in critical literacy curriculum is that teachers look to their own literate practices about the texts that impinge on our work in specific locations. These texts of our daily lives can form part of the scripts of literacy lessons if we make the time and space for them. Part of constructing critical literacies involves working on ourselves as readers and writers: 'reading the world and the word' (Freire & Macedo 1987). In the last few weeks, for example, we have witnessed a number of key federal government decisions including cuts to universities, TAFE and school education sectors, cuts to training programs for the unemployed and, at the same time, the decision to impose the new 'gun levy'. These decisions will inevitably make a difference to our lives as educators and as citizens and to those of our students. As a number of educators have pointed out, literacy is not essentially a liberating force. It may be put to domesticating or colonising uses (Donald 1993; Pennycook 1996) and more often it may have contradictory and/or differential consequences for different people.

For these reasons, literacy teachers' work is political (whether or not we choose to foreground its political nature) and a starting point for me is to make the time and space in educational sites (in educational institutions and workplaces) to talk about what is happening, to talk about the effects of macro economic and political discourses and practices. It's about making time to read, write and talk about the things that are important in people's lives. These discourses affect what we think, do and say in literacy lessons and how we see the students who present. Critical literacy is about maintaining, sustaining and generating spaces of freedom, working consciously against the limits of who we can be and what we can say (following Foucault, 1983). And we're going to have to work for these spaces of freedom. We cannot argue that literacy offers power and then remove questions about language use and power from the literacy curriculum. The *Management Magazine for Transport Operators* we considered earlier is about relations of power in the workplace. We can ask: who is exercising what kinds of power in this context and with what effects? Questions such as this are central to a critical literacy project.

Workplace related 'functional literacy'

The curriculum is subject to very different manifestations which relate to the positions teachers take on regarding what constitutes literacy. Consider the two sets of literacy practices described below. Both are concerned with workplace related 'functional literacy', albeit in very different ways. Both were sent to me by adult literacy teachers. In the first instance, the teacher described her frustration at not having time to take up the kinds of literacies suggested in the university Masters course she was undertaking because she had to work her students through the set program. When I asked her about what she was expected to do, she provided the boatbuilder text as an example. In her prescribed curriculum package, this was described as a 'reading and comprehension activity' under the broad heading of 'Communication Skills'. (See excerpt in Figure 4 - source unknown). Teachers were advised to divide the class into two groups, to have one group write down the missing information as they read the article and the other group to write down after reading the article, then to compare which approach was more effective.

Figure 4.

Read the following passage
The job of a boat builder is a very skilled one. Boatbuilders start with a plan which is drawn by a draftperson. Often they may be involved in designing boats themselves.

The first thing boatbuilders must do is build a model of the boat which is constructed. Boatbuilders are then involved in lofting, that is drawing the boat out to full size on a floor.

[two further paragraphs here on the process of boatbuilding and task to be done]

Using the words provided finish putting the passage into point form
Boatbuilders must:

- Build ______________________________
- Draw ______________________________
- Get ______________________________

In the second instance, an adult literacy teacher described her joy when the class began to get involved in short writing projects which had specific social goals. She included a copy of one student's piece, both the draft-handwritten version and the final edited and typed script (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Letter to Payroll Director.

Director of Payroll Services
[Address]

Dear [Director's name]
I have sent three transfer forms of application to your department over the last several weeks and my request has not been carried out. I would like the whole of my pay credited to the [name] Credit Union (account number).

As I am sure you are aware the [name] bank has charges on all of their cheques and even charges for counting change. This is why I want the whole of my pay credited to the [name] Credit Union for there is no charge. If this could be resolved I would be much happier for I will not have charges on my account.

Once again I ask that the whole of my salary be paid to the account I have nominated.
Thanking you,

Yours sincerely

The letter goes on to question the charges which have been made under the incorrect present system and to argue politely but firmly that the matter be attended to and corrected. The drafts of the letter indicate that the literacy teacher has assisted the writer to construct his message in the language register which will do the job required without any offence.

Without doing a detailed analysis, on the evidence of the texts alone, we can readily see that very different kinds of literacies are being played out here under the umbrella of functional workplace communication. The boatbuilder activity has students practising literacy skills as though they were context-free. The concession to relevance and authenticity is presumably the boat-builder content of the text. Beyond that, no other attempt is made to simulate the conditions of workplace communication or literate practices. The students are required to practise finding the main points in a decontextualised text which reads as though it has been written just for this purpose. It is assumed that the literate competence can be isolated and learnt in this way. In the second example, the teacher has assisted in composing and editing a letter to fix a problem in the student's workplace. This is not genre practice for its own sake, nor a decontextualised 'activity', or as a student once described it, a 'literacy non-event'.

Literacy as social practice

A number of adult literacy tutors enrol in our graduate programs and, over the past two years, we have been checking out how they respond to our curriculum and pedagogy (Simpson 1996). We have set up a dialogue so that they can assess the course – can be critical of our critical literacy! Some of them argued that 'you've got to learn the basics before you can go on and do anything else' and I will quote from my colleague's report on this.

Nearly half the women were teaching adults with English literacy difficulties. They were working in a political context where the emphasis had been very much on measurable outcomes and where teachers have traditionally had less access to professional in-service. There is often pressure from the employers and from students for quick results and the curriculum reflects this orientation. The adult literacy teachers explained to us that their students were struggling to distinguish between 'is' and 'as' so how could they be expected to engage in critical analysis? They said that the adults they taught usually had very clear and specific needs and that they could not see the relevance of teaching critical literacy. One teacher said 'the teaching I do is with adults at TAFE at night time and they're all people who don't even have functional literacy. So they're looking for very basic stuff about how to read and write. They're not into critical literacy.' For these teachers, critical literacy was a luxury you might practise after you had learned to be a competent reader, not something that could be developed alongside learning to read. (Simpson 1996)

This 'basics-first' argument is also found in schools, the media and government policy. It is dangerous because it assumes that 'basic', 'functional', 'workplace' literacy can be simply defined and delivered, and that its effects are unproblematic, positive and predictable. In educational institutions, this belief can result in teachers offering students a limited curriculum – 'a pedagogy of poverty'– for the students who are already disadvantaged (Haberman 1991; see also Comber 1996). Yet basic literacy can be domesticating rather than liberating and is not automatically tied to any kind of personal power (Donald 1993; Luke 1996). One way out of this circular debate I think is offered in the model of literacy as social practice developed by Peter Freebody and Allan Luke (1997). According to this framework, literate practices simultaneously involve code-breaking, meaning making, text use and text analysis. All students need to take on all roles, not watered-down decontextualised bits selected as appropriate for different stages of growth. That students get access to these forms of literate practice is of increasing importance in global economies which rest increasingly on information as a central commodity and information transfer as an essential service.

The information revolution is among the most pervasive forms of social change

> experienced by the current generation ... to the point where by the mid-1970s information workers (including computer manufacturing, telecommunications, mass media, advertising, publishing and accounting) comprised more than half the US workforce. (Gilbert 1992: 53)

For the purposes of my argument here, this social change means that the kinds of literacies to which workers and students have access and in which they gain competence are crucial. Failing to make the time and space for critical literacies, in a world increasingly mediated and organised through textual practices, is to exclude important social and political motivations for becoming literate and to deliver forms of literacy which benefit those who are already privileged.

In the early nineties, when economic rationalism was really hitting its straps and starting to bite in Australian educational policy, I spent nearly two years researching literacy lessons in socio-economically disadvantaged school communities. What I found is too long a story to describe here, but one observation that relates to the present context is the ways in which teachers described children as workers and used a managerial discourse generally to describe classroom activities. Further, the extent to which these discourses were taken on by the children in describing themselves is also interesting. Here's a six-year-old child's written self-evaluation at the end of term.

> In class I'm a good listener and I'm on task. I don't call out and I don't fiddle. I concentrate, I clean up and I help other children. I give eye contact to the person talking and I don't talk to others when I do my work. I always co-operate. I listen to instructions and I always try my best.

Here we can see the local impact of managerial discourses in the early years' literacy classroom. My question is about how the wider societal discourses come into the education setting and make a difference to what goes on. Is this what we want kids to do? Maybe some of it is. If your students were to write a self-evaluation at the end of their literacy course, what would they write? What messages are they getting about who they should be and what they should do? What competencies would they be ticking? How do our educational practices construct the literate student? What are we telling students about what literacy does and doesn't do? What can students speak about in the literacy classroom? What kinds of texts do they read and write and speak? Is the social world of a text ever questioned?

In the disadvantaged school communities referred to above, teachers worked hard to make some time for literate practices concerned with justice, human rights and peer rights. They had to consciously struggle to maintain that space. For the remainder of the paper, I explore some ways of making critical literacy part of everyday practices in a political context that increasingly foregrounds productivity, standards and outcomes.

Using humour, critical reading practices and community texts, some teachers, despite these pressures, have made the time to do other than limited versions of functional or basic literacy and to work with students on acquiring a range of literate practices that can work for them in their worlds.

Making critical literacy a part of everyday practices

Critical literacy is not something you do a lesson a week. It's about what you bring into the classroom and what you make important on a daily basis. In the brief examples which follow, I explore a range of practices which teachers in the school, adult and tertiary sectors have been developing with their students. To conclude, I draw out some key principles from these examples. I begin with a scrapbook.

Readers' scrapbooks

Over the last five years I have kept a series of scrapbooks of items from the popular press about literacy, schooling, gender, youth, teachers, poverty and unemployment - topics which are central to my work. We asked students enrolled in our courses to do the same, that is, to collect and keep cuttings from papers, magazines and so on about themes which were crucial to their work. They kept articles that make them angry, for whatever reasons. Our rationale was that one of the easiest ways to practise critical literacy is to start with the texts that matter, to start with the texts that have an effect on people's lives.

In my case, this included articles with headlines such as the following:
'Primary Students' Literacy Slammed', 'Why South Australian Children are Failing Spelling Tests'; 'Students Struggle To String Syllables Together'; 'Employers Lash Out At School Training'; 'Training Leading To Poor Literacy' ; 'Poor Literacy Costs $6.5Billion, Bosses Told'; 'Tests For Three R's In Primary Schools'; 'State School Exodus'; 'School Under Siege As Teachers Crack'; 'Parents Attack Teachers' Skills'; 'Parents Asked To Judge Schools'; 'Declining Literacy Skills For Study'. And cartoons with punchlines like: 'We learned our ACB in school today'; 'A is for apple, b is for ball, c is for kat'; 'What Comes After ABC? CES?'; 'State schools down 4,000 students and I reckon half of this lot aren't all there'; 'We learnt the three-R's today, reading, writing and wrecking'.

Over a period of some years we can witness in these media reports the construction of a literacy crisis, the erosion of confidence in teachers and public schooling, and the scapegoating of literacy and schooling as explanations for economic downturns, violence, unemployment and poverty (for extended discussion see Comber 1996).

How do these scrapbooks connect with the practice of critical literacies in our tertiary classrooms? While students are putting together their scrapbooks, they're reading Paolo Freire, Allan Luke, James Gee, Colin Lankshear, Carole Edelsky and other educators who have argued for the political nature of literate practices and pedagogies. Students use their readings of theory as they annotate their scrapbooks with questions and observations about the representations of the world constructed in the press. As teachers, we demonstrate our own readings of some shared articles where the 'truth' about illiteracy is constructed. For example, about *'Poor Literacy Costs $6.5Billion, Bosses Told'*, we pool our questions and observations:

What is poor literacy?
How might it be measured?
Are these questions answered in the article?
What does the writer take for granted about the readers?
How do we know what poor literacy costs?
·Who might calculate these figures and how would they do it?
Who might pay for these figures and for what kinds of reasons?
How does this text claim authority?
Who's allowed to speak?
Who's quoted? Why?
How does this text claim authority?
Who is the authority on literacy in this text?
How does the language of the text work on you as a reader?
What does this text not explain about itself?
What other texts have you read like this one?
What kinds of effects might such a text have?

So we begin to ask questions about these texts. We look at the lexical choices – adjectives, adverbs, verbs, nouns – in order to interrogate the text.

Teachers enrolled in our programs submitted their annotated scrapbooks and journals as part of their course work. In terms of critical literacy, they had begun by examining the everyday texts in the popular press which impacted on their lives as teachers, as women, as members of minority groups. In other words, the development of the cumulative scrapbook and critical annotations allowed them to practise critical analysis on texts which mattered to them. Most students were enrolled as distance education students and never met their lecturers or fellow students. However, we can well envisage the potential of discussion of the scrapbooks and journals which would be possible in an adult literacy setting.

Our aim in the scrapbooks assignment was to make a space within our authorised curriculum to consciously work against what limits us, what limits what we can say, what limits what we can do, what limits what we can be as teachers. Over a period of time, teachers examined not only individual articles but bigger questions about how the discourses of the media represent particular groups in society, teachers, youth, the poor, women, Aboriginal people, Asian migrants. Critical literacy is not simply asking clever questions about particular texts but examining the cumulative narratives which serve the interests of powerful alliances nationally and globally. However, we believe it is crucial not only to examine the texts which repress, oppress and distort but also to be collecting and reading the counter-texts in a community, texts written to argue back or to tell a different story.

Reading counter-hegemonic texts: cartoon anthology

There are many counter-texts explicitly written or produced to challenge dominant discourses and ideologies. Popular music, poetry, TV, films and so on include texts which aim deliberately aim to undermine the interests of the powerful. Another potentially powerful genre for social critique is the cartoon. As we have seen above, the cartoon can just as easily work in the dominant political interests or represent a conservative editorial view. However, students can be asked to make an anthology of cartoons which challenge the status quo or represent their own views. At the same time as I kept the scrapbook described above, I also actively collected examples of counter-texts, often newspaper, journal or magazine cartoons designed to question right-wing political, economic and educational discourses and ideologies. And I encourage the teachers I work with to do the same.

One advantage of the cartoon anthology as a classroom text is that you don't have to be able to read a lot of text to deal with the powerful messages. You can read the world through a cartoon by decoding relatively few words. Yet the words matter. Hence cartoons provide rich textual materials for use with students at any age and with varied literacy proficiencies. Because humour relies so much on wider knowledge and cultural experiences, it can provide useful starting points for discussion about specific cultural practices and knowledge. For example, students in literacy classes in a range of situations could usefully discuss a cartoon which depicts 'the perfect worker' as a headless creature with many arms. Students could discuss what the perfect worker looks like in their workplaces.

Students' collections of cartoons can provide excellent material for classroom discussion about how words work. Because our courses foreground social justice issues, teachers often send me copies of cartoons which develop that theme. Recent punchlines from my collection include:
'There's no longer a gap between the rich and the poor. Now it's a chasm!';
'Is being really disadvantaged an advantage? To be honest, it's a real disadvantage.';
'See Dick, Dick is poor. See Dick's grades, also poor. See Dick's family, blame the school. See the school, blame Dick's family. See Dick's future, neither can Dick.';
'So I went back to my old headmaster after thirty years and complained of my total lack of literacy. He told me to put it in writing.'

Excellent sources for such material include journals such as *Rethinking Schools* and

Education Links, publications which have an explicit social reform agenda, but it's also worth looking at the cartoon strips section in the popular press for 'The Politician' and others. Developing anthologies of counter-hegemonic texts can be useful in a number of ways. As well as providing opportunities for close textual analysis of how words work, representation, intertextuality and so on, cartoons such as the above can generate discussions about otherwise abstract topics and topics which teachers may find difficult to initiate. Discussing such collections can also do useful work in developing a group ethos and, on occasion, inspire the production of similar or related texts.

Considering questions of power through humour

As I have argued above, part of critical literacy curriculum is identifying the texts which offer powerful and accessible social critique and working on how and where such texts might be promoted and used. Critical literacy should not be depressing, self-defeating or limited to non-productive analysis. It involves examining the many ways in which words work in the world to get certain things done and the different effects those words have on different sets of people. It is not just an academic exercise. In the classrooms I described earlier, five-year-olds constructed counter texts with their teacher about problems of behaviour management in the classroom.

In this classroom, the texts of the literacy lessons themselves sometimes became occasions for humour and disruption. Innovating on the story structure of *Trouble in the Ark* (Rose 1975), a children's picture book, the teacher and the class had written and illustrated two books about their classroom life, 'Peace in Sunshine Room' and 'Trouble in Sunshine Room' (see below)

One day trouble started in Sunshine Room.
There was total chaos.
There were children everywhere and so much noise.
Darren stepped on Peter's finger.
Peter yelled in Allan's ear.
Allan pulled Bruno's ear.
Bruno flicked Larry.
Larry pinched Angela.
Angela kicked Rebecca.
Rebecca teased Mui-Ny.
Mui-Ny whispered to Shezza.
Shezza tickled Matthew.
Matthew pushed Laura.
Laura screamed at Daina.
Daina poked Rose.
Rose talked to Dzung.
Dzung laughed at Ngan.
Ngan touched Maja.
Maja punched James.
James barked at Melinda.
Melinda growled at Cim.
Cim slapped Tabatha.
Tabatha squealed at An.
An scratched Kasia.
Kasia called Sophie names.
Sophie smacked Tim.
Tim dipped Darren's head in the fish bowl.
Then Ms Campagna said, "I can't stand this chaos any longer!"
Just then Mrs. Kelly walked in and asked, "What's going on?"
"We are just having FUN!" replied Sunshine Room.
"It doesn't look like you're having fun, Ms Campagna. Why don't you go to the staff room and have some peace."
Now we'll have some peace in Sunshine Room.
PEACE AT LAST.

(Copyright Sunshine Room 1993)

The teacher had used the occasion of jointly constructing the big book to consider the way power is exercised in schools. Through the construction of a humorous text about school life the students consider the relations of power in schools and can discuss who can say and do what and what the effects might be. In another text, Peace in Sunshine Room, she had explored with students alternative positive ways of operating. What this teacher did was to make some of the problems that they were having in the classroom the object of the text.

What the implications may be for adult or workplace literacy educators I am not sure, but I suspect that there are similar situations where humour and language play could be a productive part of a critical literacy repertoire.

Using community texts: Right in front of your nose

In closing, I turn briefly to the use of community texts. By community texts, I mean the texts which arrive in the letterbox and fill our cupboards – those everyday texts which are so much a part of our lives they are often taken for granted as simply functional. These might include junk mail, the texts on food packaging or grocery items. A brief survey of households or workplaces should produce more than enough material for the literacy classroom. In advocating their use, I am not suggesting a focus on these texts as part of a functional literacy curriculum. Rather my interest is in having students look at them in new ways – to denaturalise these taken-for-granted materials, to ask questions about how these texts work and in whose interest they work. I will not elaborate extensively here, as there are a number of useful guides which outline possible pedagogical procedures for such work (see for example Comber & Simpson 1995; Janks 1993; Luke, O'Brien & Comber 1996; Wallace 1992).

Like a number of the other examples I have given above, this work begins with students identifying, collecting, selecting and classifying the texts they wish to study further. We invite students to raid their cupboards, their recycle collections and their letterboxes, and to bring to the class texts which they want to discuss. We demonstrate the principle that no texts are neutral. For example, we might consider the patriarchal discourses of Earl Grey Tea packaging and compare the histories and interests represented there with texts from Community Aid Abroad feature articles about the labour of poor women in developing countries on which tea cultivation depends or read encyclopaedia accounts of the Boston tea party. We might consider the fun food industries' marketing promotions and how they are targeted at children. We might consider toy catalogues. Texts may include Doritos packets, cereal boxes, health bar boxes and wrappers.

What we work on depends on what the group brings. However, what is common is an analysis of these texts which invites students to consider who produces these texts, for what kinds of reasons and with what kinds of effects. This involves students looking closely at who is saying what about whom and it may involve the collection of other texts, for example, financial reports in the media about contemporary marketing strategies of some of the multinational fast food corporations.

The study of such texts can be extended into their television and radio counterparts where students can investigate how language is used in the different media. Community texts offer great potential for adult literacy teachers because they are available, current and they have immediate relevance and currency in people's everyday lives.

Why bother?

Making the time and space for teachers and students to construct critical literacies is crucial at this time as, increasingly, a human capital ideology of literacy competencies dominates policies, funding of educational programs and assessment practices. In paranoid moments, I imagine scenarios where the dominance of managerial and economic discourses could result in literacy educators contributing to the training and management of an obedient and exploitable workforce. Fortunately, literacy educators are not simply automatons enacting someone else's agendas. However the uncertainty about their own employment and professional status does make it increasingly difficult to take risks with curriculum and pedagogy. Developing and maintaining the space and time for critical analysis of the world, and the texts which shape, represent and order it in particular ways, means first off that educators continue to talk with each other about the educative visions they have for and with their students.

Why bother? To offer adult students a depoliticised literacy curriculum is to invite them to participate in a sham - a limited form of literacy, a literacy which domesticates and limits, a literacy which is for someone else's benefit.

Barbara Comber is a senior lecturer and Director of the Language and Literacy Research Centre and the Language Australia Child ESL Literacy Research Node, University of South Australia. Formerly a high school English teacher, she has been involved in graduate and teacher professional development programs in language and literacy for over a decade. Her research interests include developing literacy pedagogies for diverse and disadvantaged student communities, critical literacies, teachers' work, the relationships between literacy and social justice, and historical changes in the construction of literacy curriculum.

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Questioning Text:
Critical Literacy in an ALBE Classroom

Fran O'Neill
Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE

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Introduction

Many authors warn of the dangers of non-critical literacy practices and their possible long-term effects on children and their success (or failure) at school. Gee (1990) warns of the dangers of privileging students whose home and school discourses complement each other "engaging these students in a teaching/learning process while others simply fail" (p.147). Gilbert (1990, p.56) acknowledges and is concerned that some kinds of knowledges are more valued and privileged than others in schools and that those students without this valued cultural capital are in danger of being "disenfranchised". Comber (1992, p.3) argues that all students are "gendered, cultured, politically situated ... ", but without recognition and a valuing of this, they are considered to be the students 'at risk'.

Many of the adult students I work with have seen these prophecies come true. While the reasons for not succeeding are different in some cases, (for example, older students experiencing war interrupted schooling in Europe) it is a fair generalisation that most students have distorted views of authorship, an over estimation of the value of learning spelling as their main pathway to success and a relationship with written text which overemphasises the role of decoding and encoding. Reading and writing for them is, not surprisingly, a laborious obsession with words, a task to perform in extreme anxiety, fraught with frustration and a continuing sense of failure.

My contention is that students return to 'school' as adults at their recognised point of 'failure', where finally they had to leave due to their alienation. A student who says "I couldn't write essays at school, that's my problem", in fact, not only cannot write essays using the conventions of essay writing, but is not aware of how meaning is constructed, carried in and brought to text. Their obsession with words tells me they never moved or were moved beyond words towards any understandings of construction of meaning.

Finally, being asked to write essays, for example, proved too much and became for them their point of departure from school. For these students immersion in a literate environment was simply inadequate for their needs. Literacy never became a social act on their social and cultural terms. They never developed Gee's (1990) definition of literacy: "mastery of, or fluent control over, the secondary discourse" (p.153) of school. Somehow it is necessary to now ensure that there is compatibility between the discourse of school this time and student's other discourses in which they operate fluently.

Recalling readily their points of departure from school, students have strong and well articulated opinions of what they should be learning, but mostly of what we should be teaching in order for them to become readers and writers. The sense is then, that what they are already and what they know already are quite separate notions from themselves as readers and writers. Perhaps it is because their sense of themselves is one of 'being', and their sense of themselves as readers and writers is one of 'performing', and performances are watched and judged. They watch and judge themselves continually and critically.

Their own definitions of 'literacy' then are contrary to Gee's (1990) perception of literacy as being embedded in a notion of Discourse, that is "ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities ..." (p.142). While reading and writing alone is not literacy, without reading and writing their literacy is incomplete and our task is to work towards adding reading and writing to the cultural capital which exists for each student.

Beginning

So where do you begin with literacy? Beginning with narrative is a means of tapping into the person and her/his cultural viewpoints. Students need to experience some success in order to keep going, to keep returning to classes and trying to become readers and writers, to develop some notion of authorship. Beginning writing from personal experience, from familiar starting points, is a valid way, I believe, of embarking on authorship. But, as Gilbert (1990, pp.56-57) recognises, while the pedagogical practices of whole language approaches have offered extremely useful classroom strategies for the early development of writing, we should be wary of the 'authorship fervour' of these narratives because "they construct an image of language learning which is personal, not learned; individual, not social; innate, not environmental" (p. 56). This also serves to deny students the knowledges of cultural and social construction of text, the "obvious power of cultural literacy" (Gilbert, 1990, p.56). Comber (1992, p.4) argues further that the over representation of narrative genre in the early development of writing leaves students "inadequately prepared for other genres".

In considering ways of moving students into writing beyond the personal, I became aware that they did not understand the conventions of written text, the things that written text does in order to be recognised as written text constructed by both the writer and the reader. Gilbert (1990, p.67) discusses Eagleton's notion of literacy construction as being one of intertextuality, i.e. no texts are completely original, they rely on other texts for their construction, all texts are other texts reworked. In order for these students to become authors then, they needed to work with and rework texts, developing an awareness of the ways in which texts were constructed so they could emulate these practices, not be expected to 'make up their own', an impossible task. We cannot assume that students will "pick up the new genres along with the new content" (Comber, 1992, p.4). There is nothing about their behaviour or history that suggests they will do so.

Concerned about the extreme anxiety of students and their writing attempts and concerned with the knowledge that they did not have the language of the genres, I removed the writing anxiety by (temporarily) removing the expectation that they would write at all, replaced that with a very high expectation that they would read and embarked on an intensive reading campaign. Gilbert (1990, p.70) argues that "if the craft of writing is to become accessible to students, reading - in its strongest sense-becomes of paramount importance".

So, what is "reading in its strongest sense"? Freebody, Luke and Gilbert (1991) argue that "what is entailed in the process of reading is in significant part the apprehension of discursively coded and (usually) covert ideologies" (p.440) and that these texts usually work to conceal their own ideology. Fairclough (1989, p.85) argues that ideologies are most effective when they are least visible:

> the more mechanical the functioning of an ideological assumption in the construction of coherent interpretations, the less likely it is to become a focus of conscious awareness, and hence the more secure its ideological status.

In working with these groups of students in adult settings, I am attempting to address multiple issues - discovering how texts are constructed so that students may emulate these, addressing student concern about vocabulary and spelling and identifying the ideologies that exist in text and work at sustaining unequal power relations. One of my hardest tasks is the attempt to develop a notion of literacy as social practice. Interaction around text is crucial but breaking down the entrenched perception that students have of literacy as individualistic performance is a difficult task. I am trying slowly to demolish the notion of 'reading and writing' as lone entities to be mastered, and to develop a notion of literacy as one that is connected with our lives, thoughts, values, attitudes and knowledges about the world, and that meaning is constructed because of all that.

Reading a text

I chose to read a text, a newspaper article 'Wed After You Wait', with a group of level 2 students. In choosing the text in the first place - there is a multitude of texts in the newspapers every day' - I made conscious decisions about why and how I wanted to use it. Firstly it fitted in with the subject area I have developed "Literacy through Cultural Studies" in which I attempt to bring to students' attention knowledges and debates around the issues of culture, socialisation, power, status and bias. Secondly it came from one of the most easily available adult texts - a daily newspaper.

The article was written prior to the most recent federal election when the current Liberal government was in opposition. It outlines a proposed plan to make couples wait for one year after their decision to marry. The main reason for this, given early in the article, is to allow couples time to receive counselling in a bid to reduce the divorce rate. The spokesperson for the opposition was Mr. Kevin Andrews, the then Liberal member for Menzies, who used the opinion of civil celebrants to support his argument.

Mr. Andrews went on to say that couples married for the wrong reasons, e.g. to leave home, to reduce the shame of not marrying, or confusing 'starry-eyed feelings' with love. He also commented that illegitimacy was more socially acceptable now and not a reason to rush into marriage. Other comments from Mr. Andrews included the possibility of exemptions for couples who had known each other for 10 years and a call for more government allocation of funds into marriage counselling.

At the same time as providing students with the newspaper article, I provided them with the following text:

1. *What is a 'Federal shadow minister'?*
2. *What is Mr. Andrews' opinion about people getting married?*
3. *Why does he believe this?*
4. *Is there anyone in the article who agrees with Mr. Andrews?*
5. *Is there anyone who disagrees?*
6. *What is a 'civil celebrant'?*
7. *What three reasons does Mr. Andrews give for people wanting to get married?*
8. *Does he think these are good or bad?*
9. *Do you think they are good or bad reasons?*
10. *Are there any other reasons why people marry?*
11. *Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Andrews? Please explain. What is your belief about marriage?*
12. *Do you think the government should allocate money for marriage guidance?*
13. *Do you think a woman's opinion should have been included in the article?*

Classroom Literacy Practice

In offering these texts to students I was looking in the long term for a variety of different written responses from different students. Before the students began reading the article, I talked to them about where the text had come from, about how it was laid out, about who had written it and about the title. I asked for questions it raised ('wait for' what? for how long? why?). After that, I read through with them the questions we would be discussing later. Unfortunately students consider these to be comprehension questions, but I will return to this discussion later.

This initial discussion was largely teacher dominated, employing the typical IRE (Inquiry/Response/Evaluation) activity patterns where I acknowledged the responses of students who told me what I wanted to hear and asked for more from students who did not. I was working with an agenda - I wanted the students to have some questions to read for rather than approaching the text 'cold'. My experience with these students has given me too many "I didn't understand it" responses. I wanted them to experience some level of interaction with text as they read so they might participate actively in any social literacy practice that ensues.

When students had had time to read this text, I asked them what they thought of it. One student replied "hard", another said there were too many big words in it, others agreed there were lots of hard words. I asked what they had thought of the idea of a new law being brought in that would make people wait for at least a year before they could marry. The question invoked a fair amount of response - some students said they had no right to do that, people should be able to marry when they wanted. I asked them whether they thought it was likely that this law would be brought in, and if so when? That became a difficult question, but one student replied that they probably would bring it in, because they had the power to do it, and it was the sort of thing that politicians did all the time. I asked them what sort of things they or others (and which others?) could do to have a say in it. Nobody had a suggestion about it, and the same student replied "You can't do anything. If they want to do it, they just will."

We then attempted to locate the main speaker in the text and his position/title. Mr. Andrews was identified by some students and others were led to it. His title or position of Federal shadow minister was identified by one student who was asked to direct us all to the appropriate text. I asked students what this meant, and after some silence one person said they did not know, and others agreed that they did not know. One student finally, tentatively, asked if it was something to do with the opposition and another student asked him what that was. 'Federal' was a problem all round.

Freebody, Luke and Gilbert (1991, pp. 441-442) talk about knowledges that texts presume and the schematic links that students are called on to make in order to make sense of text. This is not necessarily a cognitive resource, but a cultural one. In order to make some sense of this article and the identity (and power) of the speakers, students need the appropriate cultural and social terminology. Not having this resource on hand places them in a position of extreme disadvantage and they adopt the powerless discourses of people having things being done to them by governments and bureaucracies. Defining terms is an integral element of reading, not an isolated skill apart from text. We used the text to find other references to Mr. Andrews in an attempt to work out his status and power.

We found:

- *a Federal shadow minister*
- *the Liberal member for Menzies*
- *the opposition spokesman for schools and vocational training*
- *the parliamentary secretary to the Deputy Opposition Leader, Mr. Peter Costello*
- *'he said the Federal Government should have ...'*

We included the last point because it helped tell us that he couldn't be a member of the Government, otherwise he would not be criticising them. This led us into a discussion of how political parties control (or attempt to control) their members. Some students remembered the 'trouble' Bronwyn Bishop had had from the Liberal party over her tobacco sponsorship comments. By examining these linguistic terms and coupling that information with what we collectively knew about Australian politics, we were able to move to a more real understanding of who Andrews is and what he represents.

After we had established that Andrews was a federal shadow minister, with new understandings of what that meant, we returned to the question of his authority and ability to introduce this new law. Student positions began to change and many saw it as another of the "bloody Liberal party's" tactics. Explanations of this were mostly limited to statements like "they're idiots", "they just want to control everyone", and "they don't know what they're talking about". One student said, "Look what bloody Jeff Kennett did to Victoria" and that is the direction that conversation took for some time.

In asking myself "what counts as reading?" I realised that students needed the chance to position themselves politically and in fact this positioning led them much more clearly back into the text. My greatest reward was they had stopped worrying about the words and were concerned for the issues. And their positioning was made possible because 'reading' in this instance had become a social practice and not an individualistic one. Gilbert (1990, p.58) maintains that it is through participation in social practice that people learn to read and write. This implies that our classroom must become a more effective venue for active social practice and must work towards convincing students that this is valid learning. Very often students see talking as fun (and a diversion) and writing as work.

Ideological Positioning Devices

Fairclough (1989, p.85) argues that:

> texts do not typically spout ideology. They so position the interpreter through their cues that she brings ideology to the interpretation of texts - and reproduces them in the process.

One of the ideological positioning devices that this text has employed is to present the opinions of Mr. Andrews in an uncontested manner. In the past when we have worked with newspaper articles we have usually been able to pull out the main argument, line up the supporting opinions and evidence and contrast that to opposing opinions and evidence. In this particular article all other opinions quoted are in support of the argument that people should not only wait but be forced to wait. In asking students questions like 'is there anyone in the article who agrees with Mr. Andrews?', 'is there anyone who disagrees?' and 'do you think a woman's opinion should have been included in the article?' I am attempting to highlight for them that they must read not only what is in the text, but what is not. These questions asked by readers leads to more critical readings of text.

In discussion with a group of students around this issue, we were able to realise that the journalist had said nothing on her own behalf but had used the 'characters', the 'speakers' in a selected way to construct the article. In ascribing agency to Kevin Andrews, the author has given him authority, supported by his position of status, while she has remained voiceless. In this way she avoids responsibility for the issues.

There is no indication on the part of the author of the political changes that need to take place in Australia before Andrews can force his law. Modals (the way the verbs work) are used in this text in a way that seems to indicate that this will happen when Andrews has the law passed. The opening paragraphs recognise the tentative nature of Andrews' position through the use of modals such as 'should be forced' and 'should be extended' but the article continues with the implication that Mr. Andrews' position is much more definite than it is:

- *'greater time in counselling would reduce the divorce rate'*
- *'I propose'*
- *'it is more constructive to make marriage less easy'*
- *'marriages were doomed'*
- *'people marry because'*
- *'would be a step in the right direction'*
- *'would be like adding glue or cement'*

while implying a fairness:

- *'exemptions could be made'*
- *'we could make exceptions'.*

The use of the personal collective *'we'* in this clause is the only attempt to personalise the proposal. Andrews is distanced from the issue through use of *'he'* and *'they'* language. The use of *'we'* in *'we could make exceptions'* serves to entrench the power of the policy makers.

Naturalised Versions of the Social World

In addition to the devices used in the text, the use of unqualified statements which are uncontested create a version of the social world that relies on being unquestioned. These include:

a. *'illegitimacy was more socially acceptable today'*. Do we respond by internalising that 'truth', or do we respond by asking questions like- 'but more socially acceptable by whom?', 'more acceptable than what?' and 'who uses that sort of terminology if it's not an issue?' Without the latter questions, the statement is further entrenched by its following clause *'and was not a reason to rush into marriage'*.

b. *'civil celebrants he had spoken with recognised the need for greater education'* - 'how did they recognise this need? what type of education? how many civil celebrants? where did he meet them? and what gender were they?' are some questions that are not addressed in the argument and nor are they meant to be, because, by recording them as truths the ideologies have become commonsense, naturalised versions of the social world and social relationships. The issue that civil celebrants are not necessarily marriage guidance experts or clairvoyants is also a question not entered into unless the reader chooses to do so.

Subject and Reading Positions

Freebody, Luke and Gilbert (1991, p.443) concern themselves with the ways in which texts "covertly position readers into ordering their sense making procedures with a covert ideological perspective". They discuss the notion that texts work only when the reader operates from the same ideological perspective of the author.

Students were able to partially position themselves early and develop some level of scepticism towards text in a re-reading of it. Luke (1993, p.150) argues that scepticism is imperative to avoid "the risk of a simple uncritical reproduction and with it a perpetuation of the procedures of incorporation into those same cultures".

While students have moved to identify what is missing from the text, they can more explicitly identify the ideological positions of the text, from which the reading then 'makes sense'. These positions seem to be:

a. marriage is the norm
b. a high divorce rate is undesirable and
c. all couples are heterosexual.

A reading of the text from these ideological stances makes the text more 'sensible'.

Notions of Authorship

As students moved towards the stage of writing responses to these texts, there was a great deal of nervousness and anxiety. By now I am insisting on some level of written response from each student grounded in the discussion, analysis and debates around the text. I expect some students to simply find words and phrases that will help them respond, while others are required to write their own structure and grammar. This is because I expect all students to develop some notion of authorship as their understandings of text construction are developing. I have reviewed with students on many occasions how they could use both my 'questions' (questions 1-13 above) and the text to write sentences.

Some students have taken the next step which I am beginning to insist on and that is, rather than content ourselves with a sense of having responded to the text, we need to now to embark on creating our own texts which are a combination of the meanings of the text and our own commentary on these constructions. When students first began writing responses to my text questions, they treated them as comprehension questions to be considered right or wrong, and that I was the one who had the authority to make that judgement. Slowly but surely they are using other criteria to make these judgements but still answer question after question in the order they are written.

We have moved from squashing responses on to the sheet of paper around the existing text to writing on a different piece. Most students write the question in red pen and the answer in blue or black. One student told me that she knew she did not have to do this, but it made her feel safe to do so. She now feels confident enough to leave the questions out of her text and to move between the two pieces of paper.

The next step that I have asked certain students to take is to rewrite their own text leaving out all the markers that indicate they are 'answers to questions'- the questions themselves, the numbers, the gaps. What students have ended up with is, I hope, a text which highlights the main point and purpose of the reading and a critique of this. Usually in the writing of this students are using the exact language of the text. They are concerned that this is 'copying' and I am concerned that they are free to 'copy' this written text and use the models of grammatical construction . Gilbert (1990, p.67) argues that:

> authentic authoring must rely, to a considerable extent, on imitating a known language system, because if it did not, it would be unreadable: unrecognisable, unidentifiable, unclassifiable.

In addition, for these students 'authoring' could become an endless repetition of the personal - *'I think ...', 'I believe ...'*, or *'My opinion is ...'* texts.

A View of Narrative

During the process of writing and talking about why people marry a student said to me: *"I didn't even get married. Me and my boyfriend, we've lived together for twenty years."* I asked her whether she wanted to put that into her text (and strongly encouraged her to do so!). She wrote *"I didn't get married. I didn't want to."* I asked her to look back through the newspaper article and see if the author had used 'I'. We agreed that she had not and it was one of the things that had made the writing 'strong'. I asked her if she knew other people who lived with their partners, not married. Yes, she knew many. I told her that I did too and suggested that we try to begin her sentence with 'many people' or 'some people'. She thought 'some people' was the best choice. Finally, after drafting, calling in other students for advice and re-reading and rewriting, she wrote: *'Not all people marry. Some people live together happily for many years'.*

These are not complex sentences. The student is now working independently, but not only has she finished this text with a sense of authorship, she has produced a text in which she and her social reality are represented. It is a step towards breaking down the exclusion and alienation that many of these students experience in their interaction with text and in literacy events.

These attempts at encouraging students away from narrative do not stem from a desire to banish narrative from our lives and classroom, but from a perceived need to extend the repertoire of students into genres which are less familiar, more personally removed. While students are, in reality, transposing their opinions and perceptions onto the text with the emergence of statements such as *'there are other reasons why people marry'*, the absence of sentence starters like *'I think'* releases the writer from personal responsibility. In return, the move to nominalisation ascribes power and status to them as authors, allowing the text, rather than the individual person, to carry the ideology.

The process of getting there is a long and often tedious one and one that employs, indeed possibly exploits, the methodologies of Whole Language. Throughout the activities where we have been working on these texts, we have used joint construction of text, drafting, conferencing, editing, and ultimately ownership of text, one of the long-term aims of Whole Language.

Critical Literacy And Discourse Critique

Critical literacy is related to the idea of resistant reading, "a disciplined reading and writing 'against the grain'" (Freebody, Luke and Gilbert, 1991, p.450) rather than passive readings of text which serve to reproduce ideologies. In working towards a definition of literacy Gee (1990, p.145) states:

> it is sometimes helpful to say that it is not individuals who speak and act, but rather that historically and socially defined Discourses speak to each other

through individuals.

If this serves as an acceptance of literacy then it is one which reproduces and naturalises ideologies inherent in text. While it may be valid to reproduce different values and beliefs in and through text, the responsibility for this decision must lie with the individual. Challenging these historical and social Discourses by reading with resistance and conflict is one way in which readers may consciously position themselves comfortably, both socially and culturally.

Personal Reflection

Freebody, Luke and Gilbert (1991, pp.451-452) suggest that discourse critique can be 'launched' from the following general strategies:

- deliberately providing texts that will cause disagreement with students' prior experience
- foregrounding the sources of particular texts and their historical, social and political starting points
- engaging students in asking questions of each other rather than the teacher
- teaching of multiple texts and genres around a theme or topic or subject.

These strategies require a conscious naming of the ideologies,a recognition of texts which exclude readers, a naming of the position of a text and aligning this with the position of the reader. Even when texts sit with the reader, it is valuable to locate the source of this comfort, i.e. the common positioning of reader and text so that as producers of text students are conscious of how they can and may establish ideologies and write with authority.

Comber (1992, pp.6-8) cites several examples of teachers actively working with language and text to develop these critical analysis skills. The role of the teacher in these examples is an active and crucial one. Rather than "devaluing product and making values invisible [which] can lead students to think that secrets are being kept" (Comber, 1992, p.2) the teacher's role is being marked as one which provides guidance, direction and support. Teachers must provide the scaffolding for students into text and into critiques of text and their positions. Gilbert (1990, p. 63) suggests that:

> teachers and students need a socially critical understanding of the way language, particularly written language, works: the way in which it can be used to mystify, to exclude, to distort, to exonerate, or to delude.

Teachers also carry responsibility with the types of texts they choose, omit and abridge and in their own interactions with texts teachers "will need to be involved in a process of critical scrutiny of their interpretations and judgements" (Comber, 1992, p.6). Texts need to be authentic and ones which carry the real debates of our society. These debates come from many cultural stances and exposing students to a wider variety of genres which our worlds create will be more advantageous to these students.

I also have responsibility for the types of literacy practices I choose to reward and value. In my case, there is the very real possibility that I will value students who move more quickly into beginning to control genres other than narrative. Indeed some students' fear is so great they do not control narrative and recount well, and are largely still obsessed with spelling. It is easy for me to value those students who realise that the construction is much more crucial than the surface structures of their text.

It is also easier to value the students who are more willing to have their own positions challenged and who are more receptive to the notion that they are responsible for what they read i.e. those who are more willing to be more critical readers, and in addition who lean towards my line of political thought. I see it as part of my responsibility to challenge students who do not wish certain versions of the status quo to be questioned, and challenging these rationally with text analysis is an equitable way to address this. I do not think I have been explicit enough with students about notions of ideological positioning in texts, the starting point or understanding(s) from which the texts make sense. We need more consciously to break down the 'natural' assumption on which a text relies.

I also need to examine more closely the issue of multiple readings of a text. From time to time I employ texts other than print. These have worked well when we have been able to read the same issue through say, a newspaper article, and a segment on the same issue from a current affairs program.

Another way of using multiple texts in my literacy practices discussed above is to use other texts, not on the issue of waiting for marriage debate, but on issues of law and its creation in Australia, its processes and inequities and of social organisation, social control and regulation. Tracing the origins of these constructions will provide all of us with more challenges, more exciting ways of seeing the world and acting on our beliefs, values and attitudes in ways that both recognise and change our social and cultural constructions.

Fran O'Neill has been teaching and coordinating adult literacy at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE for the last six years. She has been actively involved in several projects during that time including *Negotiating Competence: The Impact on Teaching Practice of the CGEA* and the reaccreditation of the CGEA. Fran is also a member of the editorial group of *Fine Print*, the journal of the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council.

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Critical Literacy & Numeracy in the Print Industry

Helena Spyrou and Ivan Parrett

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> .. the company has been talking to workers about changes like new machines and 12 hour shifts and about sacking people.' (Nick)
>
> Morale is terrible … half the people don't give a shit anymore … this new management is kissing off experienced workers ... they're just interested in making the dollar. (Len)

Introduction

Companies face mergers, change and restructure. Workers live constantly with uncertainty and fear - a familiar scenario in many industries. In this context, there are a number of players - company managers, trainers, supervisors, workers, college teachers and program co-ordinators - each needing to address their own agenda. Most workers have a clear understanding of the implications of many players with varied and opposing agendas - they deal with it everyday. The workers we came to work with understood these issues but needed the skills to analyse and act upon this understanding. The issues are complex. There are workplace issues and pedagogical issues and it is not in the scope of this article to provide an in depth analysis of these issues. We, as educators, engaged in a critical literacy/numeracy for the workplace and we want to outline some of the approaches we used.

A critical theory of education does not need to disregard the needs of the workplace. A critical theory in the workplace can look at where workplace practices fit into the wider scheme of things. It can explore such issues as the rhetoric of workplaces where workers are encouraged to learn the skills needed to contribute knowledge and ideas, and to work collaboratively with others. At the same time, it can encourage all concerned to acknowledge, and perhaps, address the conflict of the rhetoric with the reality in workplaces where the opportunities are not there for workers to use new or existing knowledge and skills. A critical theory can explore and dispel myths about workers that assume that workers are not interested in thinking and have limited potential - myths generated by the ideas of people such as Henry Ford which still influence managers' and supervisors' attitudes towards their workers.

We hope to dispel common myths about a utilitarian approach to Workplace Basic Education (WBE) Programs that is restrictive and narrow. We hope to show that we are able to use critical theory in the workplace in a multiplicity of literacies and numeracies.

It all began ...

A survey into the literacy/numeracy needs of the Printing Industry was conducted in 1993 and a pilot Workplace Basic Education program of 8 weeks aimed at meeting those needs was established in one company in October 1993.

This year, we taught two more groups - an ALBE/numeracy group and an ESL literacy/numeracy group. The majority of the people in the first group were also involved in the pilot group in 1993.

We didn't develop a curriculum before the course began. We began by listening to the workers' concerns, by finding out what they knew. As we did this we devised a curriculum that helped build up their existing knowledge. This was a course in consultation, a course that helped a group of people to critically understand what was happening in their workplace.

We were given the opportunity to team teach the groups, each of us contributing our respective expertise in literacy and numeracy. We encouraged the group to develop a critical understanding of how literacy and numeracy interrelate. We gauged the mood of the group and modified our planned material accordingly, and this was crucial. Rarely did the planned material get used without alteration, which can be fairly nerve-racking, but it generally enriched the sessions and gave the whole group that feeling of inquiry and discovery, rather than simply receiving information. We hit upon methods of integrating literacy and numeracy that worked for that particular group at that particular time and may not work with other groups.

We would like to highlight three approaches that we used:

1. *Conducting a survey of workers' attitudes to workplace change.*
2. *Exploring workplace change via the history of work and current work issues.*
3. *Developing critical literacy/numeracy using graphs as texts.*

First there was the survey ...

In the pilot program workers conducted a survey of changes in their workplace, because they were being adversely affected by these changes.

The workers surveyed the effectiveness of three areas: the Consultative Committee, Teamwork, and Training. They wrote open and closed questions, decided the percentage of the workforce to be sampled in order to get a fair idea of what workers generally think and represented this percentage as a ratio. They interviewed 1:4 workers from 4 sectors in their workplace.

In small groups, workers collated responses to the questions, converted numbers into percentages and represented them in graphs. They then analysed results by extracting meaning from figures, wrote up the findings, and then made conclusions and recommendations based upon those findings.

In pairs they each wrote a section of the report. The group edited the document by identifying gaps, removing extraneous information, checking for meaning, structure, appropriateness of language in relation to audience and sequencing the information. Then they determined the layout, designed the front cover and proof read the document.

The energy in the room during those sessions was electric. The survey was a 'success' in that it had very positive learning outcomes for all workers involved. The group that conducted the survey had an opportunity to research, analyse and act on their concerns about changes in the workplace. Th survey offered an opportunity for the group to integrate literacy and numeracy skills into a concrete contribution to the workplace. We all engaged in:

- *developing an understanding of the 'big picture';*
- *working in teams;*
- *developing critical thinking and analysis strategies;*
- *problem solving;*
- *effective communication skills.*

Management considered all of the above appropriate outcomes.

The survey findings concluded that for workers to be interested in the Consultative Committee they need to believe their concerns will be heard and that management will not monopolise those meetings. Overall, workers wanted management to listen to them and to acknowledge their knowledge and experience. They tabled the survey findings at the next Consultative Committee meeting.

After the meeting, each worker involved in the survey, received a letter of praise from management outlining how recommendations from the survey would be considered and necessary changes made. The group was ecstatic and felt a great sense of achievement. They began to believe themselves to be an active part of the process of workplace change. They believed that they had been heard, that their ideas were valued.

Then came the retrenchment fears ...

When we returned in 1994 to continue the program, we found that the group had become disheartened and had lost impetus. None of their recommendations had been taken up. No changes were going to be made. It was all mere rhetoric. The focus was now on redundancies - over the Xmas break workers were told that 35 people would be made redundant. The workers believed they were being manipulated.

We're being done over ... they're always telling us how bad we're doin' ... they're giving us crap ... we're being kept in the dark.' (John)

With this threat of redundancy hanging over their heads, management could instil fear and then go ahead and instigate many changes.

'Everyone seems to be under a lot of stress. Why? Because nobody knows who is going to lose their job.' (Onorato)

'Facing retrenchment ...because of my age and because I don't have any qualifications or modern skills to fall back on ...and now with such high unemployment ...I get really so tensed up.' (Jeanette)

The group was no longer interested in any learning that involved collaboration with their workplace. So, we began with history - Ford's story, factories, assembly lines and mass production, the beginning of industrialisation and its progress into the economic rationalist 1990s. To investigate, understand and critique workplace change, we set the company's scenario within its wider historical context.

> To the majority of minds, repetitive operations hold no terrors … the average worker … wants a job in which he does not have to think … I have not been able to discover that repetitive labour injures a man in any way. (Henry Ford, *My Life and Work*)

Workers, naturally responded with vehemence:
'Ford is talking shit!';
'We want to use our brains.'

We looked at Ford's statements about workers, talked about who he was, what his role was in the rise of factories, what his value system might be and what he understood about workers' needs.

We felt that it was critical to build a feeling of healthy scepticism for all information received, to ask questions like:
'Why are we being told this, in this way, at this time?'

'Who is saying this to us and how does this information fit in with what we know already, with the way we have experienced our workplace?'

We created links between new knowledge gained and existing knowledge. We challenged each other's established attitudes and ways of seeing the world in order to pull apart what we took for granted. We encouraged questioning and our talk was lively and impassioned.

One idea led to another; one topic mushroomed into a bigger concern. Together, in this way, we generated topics as we read, wrote, investigated and worked out strategies to find out more on a topic.

Workplace issues provide a range of exciting themes with which to work.

We investigated:
- health and safety issues;
- being paid your worth;
- being respected for your knowledge;
- attitudes of supervisors and management.

We studied texts in workplace change:
- the workplace of the future;
- why restructure?;
- doing away with the boss in the name of efficiency; passionate bosses moving in on dull autocrats;
- the Total Quality Management system and;
- Japan: the high cost of its economic miracle.

We read poetry, short stories, narratives, oral histories and a wide range of graphs.

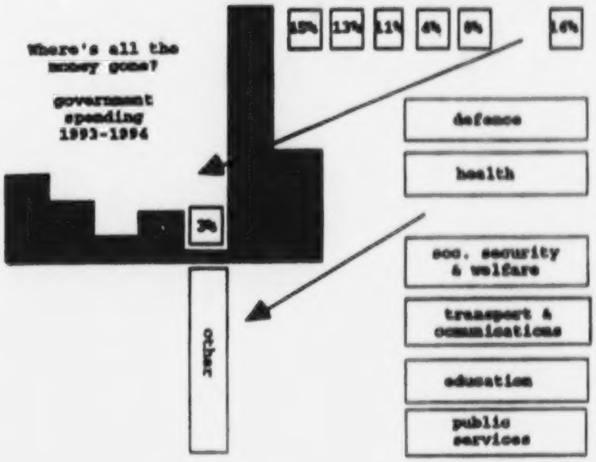
Then the graphs as text ...

Graphs have been a major focus of our teaching with these groups. We began to view graphs as texts, bringing into the discussion all the critical analysis of texts. We investigated a multitude of relevant issues that generated debate and discussion. We looked at pollution and environmental issues, aborigines, industrial waste, causes of workplace accidents, government expenditure, and production charts for the company. We used a range of graphing activities and here we'll illustrate how two types of graphing activity - 'mix and match' graphs and 'writing stories from graphs' - were used.

Mix and Match

These can be easily constructed on any topic in very little time and are generally better suited to bar/column graphs, pie charts and pictographs. *Method:* Cut the graph into separate bits of information: the outline of the graph; the percentages in the graph; and the information represented. Ask each small group to use their combined knowledge to match the percentage with the information and to give reasons for that decision. (See Table 1 below).

Table 1: Government spending graph used with the group to encourage critical literacy/numeracy skills in mix and match exercises. (First published in *Fine Print*, vol 16, no 4, Summer 1994, and reproduced here with kind permission.)



Each small group then conferred with other groups to check and discuss varying answers. Following this, small amounts of information were disclosed and each group was asked to rethink its suggestions. Information is discovered a piece at a time and previous thoughts can be modified or confirmed.

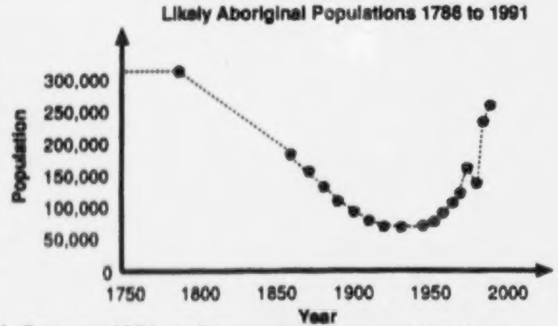
Learners do not always need to learn the same things. This activity allows them to absorb what is important to them and disregard the rest. There is no test - it is real and meaningful to them - the information has been self discovered.

Writing stories using graphs and visa-versa

A visual representation can help to get the general gist of an issue or an argument. The process of writing a story that outlines the information given by the graph leads into the investigation of the underlying issue, the history, the analysis. Plotting graphs from a report or narrative assists in understanding the language used to indicate degrees of change, such as, marked, steep, constant, dramatic, twice as, less than, more than, higher than, lower than. (See Tables 2 & 3 and students' story below.) The graphing activities are embedded in an issue, so we can look at the literacy and numeracy skills involved in the context of that issue.

Tables 2 & 3: Students use table of statistics and graph of Likely Aboriginal Populations 1786 to 1991 to write stories that outline the information supplied. (First published in *Fine Print*, volume 16, number 4, Summer 1994, and reproduced here with kind permission.)

Year	Populations in 1000's	
	Census	Aborigines (est.)
1860	1146	180
1890	3151	111
1921	5410	76
1947	7519	87
1971	12657	115
1991	16849	257



Students' story: Kire and Leanne's story

In 1750 the Aboriginal population was estimated at about 300,000 and this figures was stable until 1788, the year Australia was discovered or found by white people. Then the Aboriginal population started to fall steadily and in around 1860 it was down to 200,000. From the 1860s to the 1920s, the population dramatically dropped to a low of around 50,000. Many Aborigines were killed about that time. Then in the 1950s and 1960s the Aboriginal population started to increase again and in the 1980s there was another little fall, maybe because of Aboriginal deaths in custody. But then the population rose sharply in the late 1980s from about 40,000 to 250,000 but I don't know why what happened.

The graphing activities were generally followed by literacy activities involving discussion, reading, researching, summarising and questioning. Questioning was critical to this process. Through questioning the information in graphs and data, we found that the groups developed a healthy scepticism for visually represented information. This allowed the group to further study issues such as: how information is gathered; questionnaire techniques; how 'truthful' the information is; why that information was being displayed in a particular form; mis-information and misrepresentation of information; what the underlying issues or values are; how graphs can support or influence an argument.

We encouraged the workers to write, in a range of styles, about these issues and this culminated in the publication of a collection of writings that was published and distributed to company personnel and other workers.

We covered very relevant material that was negotiated with the group members and ensured full participation; the material was truly integrated; and we were allowed the freedom to become participants rather than simply givers of information.

These activities also influenced the way the company now presents its graphs. Because of work carried out by the groups, the company concerned has now altered the way it graphs the production information displayed in each section of the plant. Because of input from the group, the graphs are clearer and more easily understood.

And for now, we're here ...

In conclusion there are some things that we would like to reiterate, discuss and wax lyrical about.

The groups were team-taught by people who understood their respective fields of literacy and numeracy. This allowed two things, the chance to learn about another field by example and the opportunity to be much more critical of the integrated material we developed.

In developing our curriculum we were informed by the CGEA and the original Frameworks document. We used them as a guide to ensure that we covered a multiplicity of literacies and numeracies. We did not allow them to drive our curriculum.

The programme outcomes are difficult to quantify, or even identify, but at minimum many attitudes were changed. All of our students now think much more positively about themselves as learners and employees. We have changed how we feel about workplace education and the management of the company have reviewed their view of employees and changed some processes.

Basic Education in the Workplace is important. However it must always be treated as an effective and valuable education process and not as a fixed, predetermined and predesigned 'training' programme that is offered from workplace to workplace.

Helena Spyrou and *Ivan Parrett* were, at the time of writing, teachers in the Access Department of the Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE.

Fairy stories and Critical Literacy

Clara Brack
Western Melbourne Institute of TAFE

> Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in any truth that is taught in life. (Schiller)

> A fairy story is a story where one king goes to another king to borrow a cup of sugar. (Carter)

Introduction

We look at fairy stories as part of the subject 'Stories Cultures Tell Themselves'. This is a first year subject in the Diploma of Liberal Arts, a two-year course for adult students returning to study.

In this article I will explain how I used different versions of 'Red Riding Hood' to help students feel confident about discussing the meanings they give to different versions. I also aim to help students see that what they thought they 'knew' as a story passed down from generation to generation is in fact a culturally constructed artefact. I will outline some of the things we do in the class, the questions I ask the students, the questions they ask me and the responses they write in an informal journal.

So, what is my aim?

By comparing responses to different versions and by looking at responses to illustrations, I aim to show how we as readers give meanings to a story. This involves seeing that the meanings are not there in the text put there by the storyteller waiting to be discovered.

How do students feel about studying fairy stories at the start of the course?

The following responses emerge not only at the beginning but also at different stages of the course.

' I know the fairy stories. This part of the course will be easy.'
'I felt embarrassed telling my friends we're doing fairy stories. It seems babyish.'

'Stories are for entertainment. Doesn't it spoil the story to study it?'

Although students may feel puzzled about why we are studying fairy stories, they come to the first class comforted that they already 'know' the fairy story. I aim to challenge what it means to 'know' a story that, as Schiller says, has deeper meaning than any truth that is taught in life. And as Ian McEwan suggests

> What we like about children's books is our children's pleasure in them, and this is less to do with literature and more to do with love.

Perhaps the reason we remember the stories of our childhood is more to do with the context of the reading than the stories themselves. The climate surrounding the reading or the studying determines in part what is possible to learn. So, whilst there are certain ideas I'm aiming for the students to arrive at, I'm also aiming to establish a particular climate in the class, a climate which will enable the students to come to feel comfortable about discussing a text.

Whilst students have different feelings about studying fairy stories, they experience a common anxiety about being 'right' or 'wrong' in their public response to the story. Reading is a private activity. The experience they bring as students is framed by the anxiety of *'What's it permissible to talk about in this room now with these other students and with this teacher?'* It is also framed by the feeling that if fairy stories are to be discussed then the teacher must have the right or wrong answer to the stories. Students discover by listening to others' responses to the same story that there is more than one meaning for the story. *'If there is more than one meaning 'in' the story', they ask, 'then who put it there? It must be the author or the storyteller.'*

Whilst story telling unites groups, talking about stories can be framed by anxieties of giving the right answer in a group. We hold our private meanings to stories, but articulating them is another matter. We respond to stories emotionally. There is a gap between the emotion and the naming of the emotion and the naming of the emotion in a classroom setting of the institution. It's understandable that students think there is a right answer, a right interpretation that is arrived at by the 'experts'.

> The reading of a classic ought to give us a surprise or two vis-a-vis the notion that we had of it. For this reason, I can never sufficiently highly recommend the direct reading of the text itself, leaving aside the critical biography, commentaries, and interpretations as much as possible. Schools and universities ought to help us understand that no book that talks about a book says more than the book in question, but instead they do their level best to make us think the opposite. (p.128 Calvino)

How do I set the climate in the class?

> A scholar has a story in which the work in question is an episode: this is why seminars so often begin with 'how I came to this subject', because such a fragment of autobiography gives meaning to it all. (p.15 McCloskey)

The students come from a wide cross section of the community: age, work experience and family life. In the first session I tell a story about how I came to be teaching the subject, about stories that have been important to me, or the story of some aspect of my childhood or adult life. This is to establish that although I, as the teacher, have some teaching experience and have had time to research stories, I am, like the students in the class, a human being living in a culture where we live our lives through stories. I want to establish that the students' experience of stories is as rich, if not richer, than mine, that I am not an 'expert' on stories, that those who read, tell and listen to stories are the 'experts'.

In the second class, the students tell a story about how they came to be in the class or stories that are important to them. This is usually a very moving and humbling experience; some have extraordinary stories, and have not told them to strangers before. Students often comment after that they felt nervous and anxious about telling their story but when others showed interest they felt relieved and accepted. This storytelling is a way of establishing trust in the class. I explain that we are all a working group, me included, with the task of learning something about stories.

Having established a 'working group', in the third class, I start by asking ' What are fairy stories?'. I receive a range of responses: *'Lord of the Rings'*, Enid Blyton's *'The Far Away Tree'*, *'Science Fiction'*, *'Cinderella'*, *'Snow White'*, *'Alice In Wonderland'*, *'Peter Pan'*. Apart from defining fairy stories, this gives me an idea of the students reading background. I explain that for this class we'll refer to *Cinderella, Snow White, Red Riding Hood* and *Sleeping Beauty* as fairy stories.

Me: *How do you know these fairy stories?*

Students: *'I saw the videos.' .. 'We had a book with lovely pictures.' .. 'My teacher told them.' .. 'I read them myself.' .. 'I don't know, they just seemed to be there.'*

Me: *How did the fairy stories get put into the books or films?*

Students: *'They've always been with us.' .' Didn't someone write them down? Hans Christian Anderson?' .. 'Wasn't it Grimms? Weren't there two brothers?' .. 'Aren't they folk tales put in print?'*

Me: *Well, we'll accept at this point that the fairy stories were part of an oral culture and* *then Charles Perrault and later the brothers Grimm wrote them down and we're lucky that they did so, otherwise the stories would be lost. This is a common understanding we'll start with: Hans Christian Anderson made up some fairy stories and Perrault made some basing them on the oral stories. The folk tales are stories that were part of oral culture and after they were written down they were called 'fairytales'. All cultures have folktales. We'll focus on the Grimms' version of 'Red Riding Hood', but first we'll look at a version you probably don't know, an Italian folktale version of Red Riding Hood called 'The False Grandmother' .. Who'd like to read the story?* (See the Calvino story in the Appendices.)

Me: *What messages do you think this story is conveying?*

(I'm not keen about asking for the 'message' as it conveys the idea that the point of the story is to extract the message as a lesson and all the other words around it are superfluous. I could ask for 'What is your response to the story?' but students seem to respond best to the request to write down the message.)

Students: *'If you give to others they'll give to you' .. 'Use your wits to get out of difficult situations.'*

(What I'm aiming for here is a variety of responses. I'm aiming to get the students to see the message of 'using your wits'. Often students don't see this as they are so revolted by the boiling of the teeth. This aspect of the story is so unfamiliar to them. And it's disgusting, forbidden. If they're worried about what's permissible to speak about, how do they respond to a text like this where the unspeakable is not only put into print but given the authority that comes with reading something within the formality of the class? I'm also aiming to get students to feel confident about speaking about their response to the reading of the text.)

Me: *How is it that different students see different messages in the story?*

Students: *'Everybody thinks differently.' .. 'We all come from different backgrounds, as we saw when we all told our stories.' .. ' Perhaps you just see in the story something you're thinking about at the time of reading it.'*

(I think some students do see other messages but come with the idea that there is a special message that the teacher knows and that the teacher will reveal to them. These students may withhold their responses in anticipation. Later a student might 'confess' to not giving a response for fear it was wrong.)

Me: *Can we say that we all give different meanings to the story? The meaning is not in the story ready to be uncovered. The reader gives the story a meaning.*

(Here I've conflated 'messages' and 'meanings'. Some students are delighted and liberated by this. Others are puzzled.)
Students: *Who puts the meaning in the story? Doesn't the storyteller put the meaning in the story?*

Me: *Whilst we can say that:*

> all texts and works of art say something other than what they are appearing to say, regardless of the artist's intention. There is no single meaning to be extracted from a text. Every text, through interpretation, can be shown to have a multiplicity of meanings

we can also say that

> ... authors and artists do have intentions, and readers and viewers are moved in precisely the ways that the authors and artists intended. (p.28 Kohl)

Me: *Let's look at another version. This is a version you may be more familiar with, the Grimms' version.* (See the Grimms' version in the Appendices.) *OK what's the message in this version?*

Students: *'Don't talk to strangers' .. 'A man will rescue you if you're in trouble.' .. 'Do what your mother says.'*

(Again we see that there are different messages.)

Me: *Does the storyteller put the message in the story or do we give the story a meaning? You've looked at two versions of 'Red Riding Hood'. Which is most like the version you had as a child?*

Students: *'We had the version where the hunter comes to the rescue.' .. 'We didn't , we had ... '*

(Here there is a discussion about whether the wolf ate grandmother or whether she hid in a cupboard as in some versions.)

Me: *Does your reading of a previous version influence the way you read a version now?*

Students: *'Well you sort of compare the new version with the one you heard as a child, to see which one is better.' .. 'You feel a bit cheated when you hear a better version that you didn't have as a child.' .. ' It's reassuring to read the same one you had as a child. You feel a loyalty to that version. It's familiar.'*

Me: *Is the loyalty to the version or to the person telling you the story or the time of reading the version?*

Students: '*You have a nostalgia for that time as a child with a parent looking after you, so it's part of the fond remembering of the times.' .. 'There's an innocence about childhood, and you want to keep that.'*

Me: (Summarising for students) *The meaning we give to the story, the way we respond emotionally, is personal and is based on all we have known and experienced. But meaning is also communal in the understanding of what it means to be human. We start with meaning making which is reading, our own personal reading, and come to see that different readers give different meanings to the story.*

Let's approach this problem of meaning another way. What's the key point of the story? The meeting of Red Riding Hood and the wolf. From this point everything happens. Draw a picture of the meeting of the wolf and Red Riding Hood. Decide which version and for what audience.

What about the illustrations?

(Students like this activity. '*It's fun.' .. 'Who's good at drawing?' .. 'I'm going to make ... Look at what Jim's doing'*. They're curious about others' illustrations. This is another way of getting to know the other students. They're beginning to see that fairy stories aren't 'babyish' but can be a focus for discussion. They're happy about playing, drawing a picture. I also ask students to write a brief commentary on the drawing. *'I wanted to make the wolf .. I wanted to make the forest .. I wanted to make Red Riding Hood '* I ask them to say why they wanted to depict each character in a particular way.)

Me: *Show your picture to another student. (They've already been looking at others'.) What can you tell about the wolf and Red Riding Hood from the other student's picture? Is there anything in the picture that the other student saw that you didn't put in there? How is it possible for another student to see something in your picture that you didn't put there? Is an illustration another way of giving meaning to a story? What are the similarities and differences in the illustrations? What were you trying to show in the illustration?*

Let's go back to the question 'Does the story teller put the message in or do we give the story a meaning?' As an illustrator did you put the meaning in or did others give it a meaning?

(There are other questions here about the point of the illustration to communicate a message. How can you communicate something you're not conscious of? At this point someone will often say, *'It's just a story after all. You can read too much into a story.'*

We've drawn a picture from a version of the story. We've given meaning to other illustrations. I now show some other illustrations of the meeting of the wolf and Red Riding Hood. (See Figures 2-6 in the Appendices.) Each group of four or five looks at a different illustration and discusses how they see the relationship between the wolf and Red Riding Hood. A representative of each group shows their group's illustration on an overhead and discusses the meanings that the group gave to the illustration. This is a good introduction to 'standing up in front of the class' and using the overhead. The speaker is supported by their group members.)

Students: *'Red Riding Hood looks sweet and cute.'* .. *'No she's not, she's seductive, look at the way she's looking at the wolf.'* .. *'The wolf's after her.'* .. *'How can you tell, you can't see his face.'* .. *'The wolf just looks like a big dog to me.'*

(I give them some suggestions as a way of interpreting the illustration. Is the wolf a part of us? Is it possible that the forest represents something? Why does the mother send her daughter through the forest knowing there is a wolf there? The students come to see that they can 'play' with giving meanings, they can invent meanings.

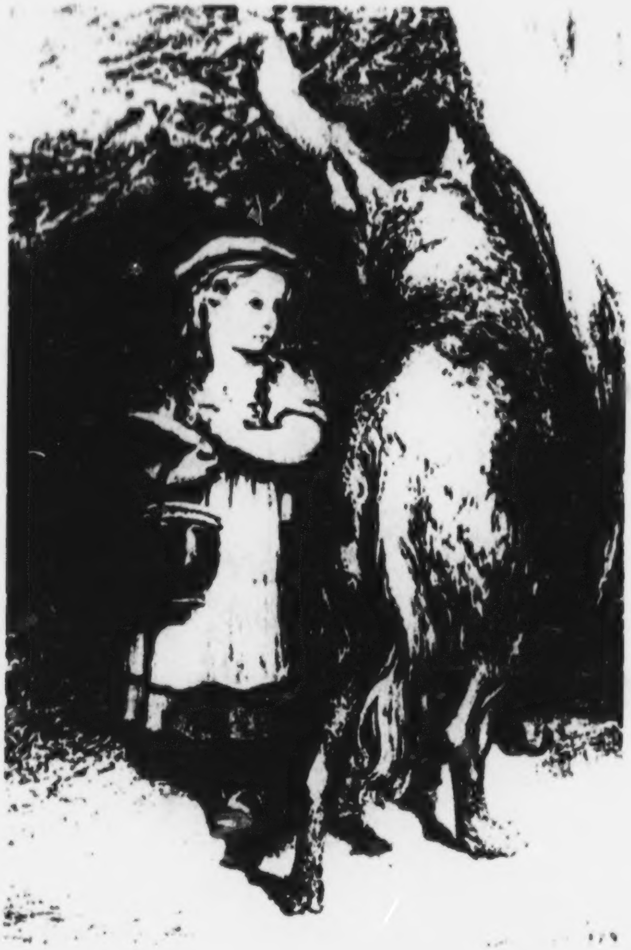
Again, the discussion of the illustration is framed by the question, 'What's it permissible to speak about?' One student wrote in her journal *'I thought that the illustration of the wolf and Red Riding Hood in bed, looked like lovers, but I didn't want to say so in class.'*)

Me: *How come there are so many different responses to the illustrations?* (Summarising student responses.) *The illustration is the illustrator's interpretation of the story. We each give different meanings to these illustrations. We interpret the illustrations as we interpret the story. The illustration can get in the way of our reading of the story, if it doesn't depict the characters in the way we imagined them. What other situations have you been in when you realised that you saw the story or illustration differently from others?*

Students: *'I went to a film. My friend was moved by it. I thought it was dull.'* .. *'I saw the film of a favorite book. It was nothing like I'd imagined the story.'*

Me: *Return to your own illustrations. Are any like the illustrations we have just looked at? What influenced you to draw the meeting of the wolf and Red Riding Hood in the way you did?* (Summarising.) *We respond individually to a text bringing past images we remember. If those images are commonly available in the culture, we bring the images of our culture.*
Illustrations are interpretations. According to one scholar, the Doré illustration (see Figure 1) *has framed the way we see Red Riding Hood and the wolf. Compare the later illustrations with the Doré illustration. What are the similarities?*

Figure 1: Doré illustration.



How do fairy stories change over time?

But when an oral tale was set down, something interesting happened. The particular variant rendered into writing took on borrowed authority from the page.

> Quite simply, it became the tale. Not only listeners seated in a particular audience at a particular time could hear the tale. Audiences separated by time and space could hear it as well. Authority is a word that grew from the root author. And so author and power became inextricably linked. By setting down a tale onto a page, the scribe became the 'owner' of a story. And if a particular reteller had wit, style, and a large printing, he had an incredible impact on the tale. (p.23 Yolen)

Me: *We've looked at different messages conveyed by the story. We've looked at how an illustration reveals a way of reading the story. Now let's look at how the story came to be written down. We started with the commonly held view that the brothers Grimm wrote down the oral stories told to them by the 'folk.' Let's look at what scholars of the fairytale say about how the Grimms wrote the story of Red Riding Hood. Charles Perrault wrote a version of Red Riding Hood based on the oral version. The Grimms were familiar with both the oral version, and the Perrault version. We'll look at the oral version on which the Grimms and Perrault based their story.* (See the oral version story in the Appendices.)

How does this oral version compare with the Calvino folktale version which as Calvino says is fairly close to the oral version told? What are the messages in the oral version? Compare the messages of the oral version with the messages of the Grimms' version.

(Again a discussion of the oral version brings up public mention of bodily functions. *'Kids like that sort of stuff.' .. 'You shouldn't tell that to kids, it's disgusting.' .. ' How could anyone think up something so gruesome?'* Later when we look at a Disney version students can see how sanitised the Disney version is compared with the oral version. Some students are so taken aback at the crude aspects of the oral version that they miss the point that in this version the girl is resourceful and outwits the wolf. They fail to see how she figures out, reasons, that this person in the bed cannot be grandmother. The result of her figuring out is that she plays a trick on the wolf.)

Me: *What is the effect on the reader of seeing Red Riding Hood play a trick on the wolf?*

Students: *By reasoning her way out of the situation she is showing to the reader that they too can reason their way out of a situation. They don't have to be the victim.*

(Some students comment on how 'modern' the oral version is, at least in how it depicts the resourcefulness of the girl.)

Me: *If its seems so modern, and this is the version that Perrault and the Grimms based their versions on, what is this saying about how these rewriters have depicted the role of the girl?*

Students: *Girls must be victims and wait for the man hero.*

> While the Grimms consciously endeavoured to work within the European tradition of oral storytelling, they also tried to improve the tales and shape them into authoritative representations of their view of the world. (p.72 Zipes, 1988)

Me: *Select sentences from the Grimms version to show how they are conveying particular messages about good behaviour and obedience.* (This is a useful way of getting students to focus on the wording of the text.) *The Grimms have incorporated patriarchal middle class values into the oral tale. What you thought was a story passed on from generation to generation was in fact a constructed story.*

> The brave little peasant girl, who can fend for herself and show qualities of courage and cleverness, is transformed into a delicate bourgeois type, who is helpless, naive and culpable, if not stupid. (p.29 Zipes, 1994A)

> 'the tale is not an ancient and anonymous folk tale reflecting universal psychic operations of men and women, but rather it is the product of gifted male European writers who projected their needs and values onto the actions of fictitious characters within a socially conventionalised genre. (p.231 Zipes, 1986)

Me: (Summary explanation.) *We give a different meaning to the story if we think the story is a product of the 'folk'. We remember stories from our childhood, but we also have stories about where the stories are from. What you thought was a story passed on from generation to generation was actually constructed by the Grimm brothers for the purpose of instructing children on how to behave as 'good' obedient children. The twentieth century versions are based on the Grimms' and Perrault versions and so replicate these values.*

What comes next?

In later classes, we read twentieth century versions of *Red Riding Hood*, a feminist version, Golden Book versions, Pop Up book versions and A Politically Correct version. (See this story in the Appendices.) We discuss the difference between writing another version and a rewriting of the story. By the time the students come to the reading of the Politically Correct version they have come to see how fairy stories are not 'babyish'.

There are other questions raised by the discussion of *Red Riding Hood*.

- *How can you read the values of the culture in the text?*
- *How are we influenced by other readings of texts?*
- *Why does the first reading of a text hold so much significance?*

I've used *Red Riding Hood* as a basis for discussion. You could use any fairy stories.

There are some excellent web sites on *Cinderella*, *Snow White* and *Red Riding Hood*.

What do students have to say at the end?

Students: *' I never knew you could read so much into a story.' .. ' I'm not reading 'Little Red Riding Hood' to my grandchildren, now I know its about sex.'.. 'I'm much more aware of asking questions of how a story got to be there in a book.'*

It might appear from these responses as if all students are 'with' the discussion. Some students feel very puzzled about me as the teacher not giving them the right interpretation. I discuss the feeling of being puzzled and the ability to bear with it. Some students think the really sanitised pop-up book version is much nicer than the others, and the one they'd give to children. Some students are still adjusting to the feeling of being able to talk about their responses in public to a group of relative strangers.

> Newly written fairytales, especially those that are innovative and radical, are unusual, exceptional, strange, and artificial because they do not conform to the patterns set by the classical fairytale. And if they do conform and become familiar, we tend to forget them after a while, because the classical fairytale suffices. We are safe with the familiar. We shun the new, the real innovations. The classical fairytale makes it appear that we are all part of a universal community with shared values and norms, that we are all striving for the same happiness. (p5 Zipes, 1994B)

In this subject, 'Stories Cultures Tell Themselves', we ask, *'Is this true?'*

Clara Brack has developed the subject 'Stories Cultures Tell Themselves' and has been teaching it (with feedback from students) for four years. As a University student in the sixties, she could never figure out the 'right' interpretation of a literary text. She read Grimms' and feminist versions of fairy stories to her children and became interested in the origins of fairy stories. This led her to the work of Jack Zipes and Marina Warner and a rethinking of the Grimm stories.

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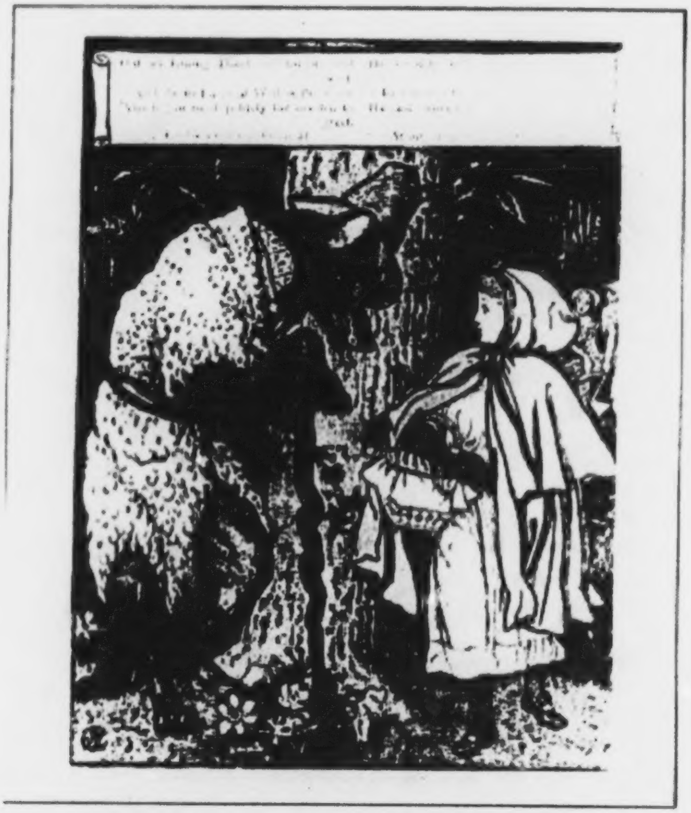
APPENDICES

Figure 2.



Walter Crane Toy Books, *Little Red Riding Hood*, London: George Routledge, 1870. Illustrator: Walter Crane. Here Crane had the Grimm story adapted to verse, and the caption to this illustration reads:

Out set Riding Hood, so obliging and sweet,
And she met a great Wolf in the wood,
Who began most politely the maiden to greet,
as tender a voice as he could.
He asked to what house she was going and why;
Red Riding Hood answered him all:
He said, "Give my love to your Gran; I will try
At my earliest to call."

The False Grandmother (from the Calvino collection)

A mother had to sift flour, and told her little girl to go to her grandmother's and borrow the sifter. The child packed a snack - ring-shaped cakes and bread with oil - and set out. She came to the Jordan River.

"Jordan River, will you let me pass?"

"Yes, if you give me your ring-shaped cakes."

The Jordan River had a weakness for ring-shaped cakes, which he enjoyed twirling in his whirlpools. The child tossed the ring-shaped cakes into the river, and the river lowered its waters and let her through. The little girl came to the Rake Gate.

"Rake Gate, will you let me pass?"

"Yes, if you give me your bread with oil."

The Rake Gate had a weakness for bread with oil, since her hinges were rusty, and bread with oil oiled them for her. The little girl gave the gate her bread with oil, and the gate opened and let her through. She reached her grandmother's house, but the door was shut tight.

"Grandmother, Grandmother, come let me in."

"I'm in bed sick. Come through the window."

"I can't make it."

"Come through the cat door."

"I can't squeeze through."

"Well, wait a minute," she said, and lowered a rope, by which she pulled the little girl up through the window.

The room was dark. In bed was the ogress, not the grandmother, for the ogress had gobbled up Grandmother all in one piece from head to toe, all except her teeth, which she had put on to stew in a small stew pan, and her ears, which she had put on to fry in a frying pan.

"Grandmother, Mamma wants the sifter."

"It's late now. I'll give it to you tomorrow. Come to bed."

"Grandmother, I'm hungry, I want my supper first."

"Eat the beans boiling in the boiler."

In the pot were the teeth. The child stirred them around and said, "Grandmother, they're too hard."

"Well, eat the fritters in the frying pan."

In the frying pan were the ears. The child felt them with the fork and said, "Grandmother, they're not crisp."

"Well, come to bed. You can eat tomorrow."

The little girl got into bed beside Grandmother. She felt one of her hands and said, "Why are your hands so hairy, Grandmother?"

"From wearing too many rings on my fingers."

She felt her chest. "Why is your chest so hairy, Grandmother?"

"From wearing too many necklaces around my neck."

She felt her hips. "Why are your hips so hairy, Grandmother?"

"Because I wore my corset too tight."

She felt her tail and reasoned that, hairy or not, Grandmother had never had a tail. That had to be the ogress and nobody else. So she said, "Grandmother, I can't go to sleep unless I first go and take care of a little business."

Grandmother replied, "Go do it in the barn below. I'll let you down through the trapdoor and then draw you back up."

She tied a rope around her and lowered her into the barn. The minute the little girl was down she untied the rope and in her place attached a nanny goat.

"Are you through?" asked Grandmother.

"Just a minute." She finished tying the rope around the nanny goat. "There, I've finished. Pull me back up."

The ogress pulled and pulled, and the little girl began yelling, "Hairy ogress! Hairy ogress!" She threw open the barn and fled. The ogress kept pulling, and up came the nanny goat. She jumped out of bed and ran after the little girl.

When the child reached the Rake Gate, the ogress yelled from a distance: "Rake Gate, don't let her pass!"

But the Rake Gate replied, "Of course I'll let her pass; she gave me her bread with oil."

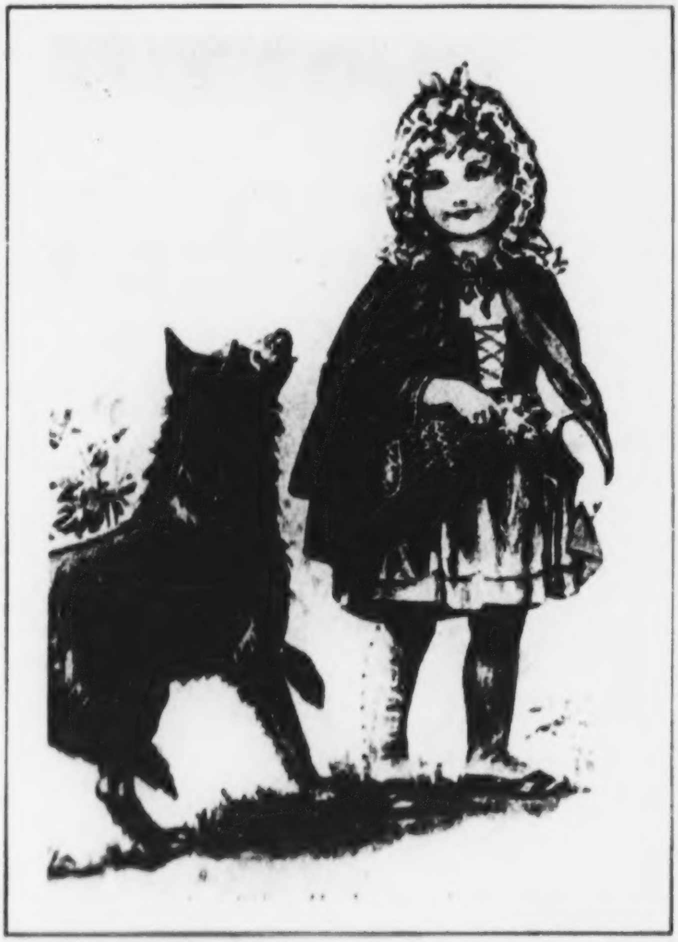
When the child reached the Jordan River, the ogress shouted, "Jordan River, don't you let her pass!"

But the Jordan River answered, "Of course I'll let her pass; she gave me her ring-shaped cakes."

When the ogress tried to get through, the Jordan River did not lower his waters, and the ogress was swept away in the current. From the bank the little girl made faces at her. (pp. 412-3)

Calvino, Italo. (1980). *Italian Folktales* (trans. George Martin). New York: Pantheon.

Figure 3.



Friends from Fairyland, London: Raphael Tuck & Sons, c. 1880. Illustrator: unknown.

Little Red Cap: Grimms version.

Once upon a time there was a sweet little maiden. Whoever laid eyes upon her could not help but love her. But it was her grandmother who loved her most. She could never give the child enough. One time she made her a present, a small, red velvet cap, and since it was so becoming and the maiden insisted on always wearing it, she was called Little Red Cap.

One day her mother said to her, "Come, Little Red Cap, take this piece of cake and bottle of wine and bring them to your grandmother. She's sick and weak, and this will strengthen her. Get an early start, before it becomes hot, and when you're out in the woods, be nice and good and don't stray from the path, otherwise you'll fall and break the glass, and your grandmother will get nothing. And when you enter her room, don't forget to say good morning, and don't go peeping in all the corners."

"I'll do just as you say," Little Red Cap promised her mother.

Well, the grandmother lived out in the forest, half an hour from the village, and as soon as Little Red Cap entered the forest, she encountered the wolf. However, Little Red Cap did not know what a wicked sort of an animal he was and was not afraid of him.

"Good day, Little Red Cap," he said.

"Thank you kindly, wolf."

"Where are you going so early, Little Red Cap?"

"To Grandmother's."

"What are you carrying under your apron?"

"Cake and wine. My grandmother's sick and weak, and yesterday we baked this so it will help her get well."

"Where does your grandmother live, Little Red Cap?"

"Another quarter of an hour from here in the forest. Her house is under the three big oak trees. You can tell it by the hazel bushes," said Little Red Cap.

The wolf thought to himself, This tender young thing is a juicy morsel. She'll taste even better than the old woman. You've got to be real crafty if you want to catch them both.

Then he walked next to Little Red Cap, and after a while he said, "Little Red Cap, just look at the beautiful flowers that are growing all around you! Why don't you look around? I believe you haven't even noticed how lovely the birds are singing. You march along as if you were going straight to school, and yet it's so delightful out here in the woods!"

Little Red Cap looked around and saw how the rays of the sun were dancing through the trees back and forth and how the woods were full of beautiful flowers. So she thought to herself, If I bring Grandmother a bunch of fresh flowers, she'd certainly like that. It's still early, and I'll arrive on time. So she ran off the path and plunged into the woods to look for flowers. And each time she plucked one, she thought she saw another even prettier flower and ran after it, going deeper and deeper into the forest. But the wolf went straight to the grandmother's house and knocked at the door.

"Who's out there?"

"Little Red Cap. I've brought you some cake and wine. Open up."

"Just lift the latch," the grandmother called. "I'm too weak and can't get up."

The wolf lifted the latch, and the door sprang open. Then he went straight to the grandmother's bed without saying a word and gobbled her up. Next he put on her clothes and her nightcap, lay down in her bed, and drew the curtains.

Meanwhile, Little Red Cap had been running around and looking for flowers, and only when she had as many as she could carry did she remember her grandmother and continue on the way to her house again. She was puzzled when she found the door open, and as she entered the room, it seemed so strange inside that she thought, Oh, my God, how frightened I feel today, and usually I like to be at Grandmother's. She called out, "Good morning!"

But she received no answer. Next she went to the bed and drew back the curtains.

There lay her grandmother with her cap pulled down over her face giving her a strange appearance. "Oh, Grandmother, what big ears you have!"

"The better to hear you with."

"Oh, Grandmother, what big hands you have!"

"The better to grab you with."

Grandmother, what a terribly big mouth you have!"

"The better to eat you with!"

No sooner did the wolf say that than he jumped out of bed and gobbled up poor Little Red Cap. After the wolf had satisfied his desires, he lay down in bed again, fell asleep, and began to snore very loudly.

The huntsman happened to be passing by the house and thought to himself: "The way the old woman's snoring, you'd better see if anything's wrong." He went into the room, and when he came to the bed, he saw the wolf lying in it.

"So I've found you at last, you old sinner," said the huntsman. "I've been looking for you for a long time."

He took aim with his gun, and then it occurred to him that the wolf could have eaten the grandmother and that she could still be saved. So he did not shoot but took some scissors and started cutting open the sleeping wolf's belly. After he made a couple of cuts, he saw the little red cap shining forth, and after he made a few more cuts, the girl jumped out and exclaimed, "Oh, how frightened I was! It was so dark in the wolf's body."

Soon the grandmother came out. She was alive but could hardly breathe. Little Red Cap quickly fetched some large stones, and they filled the wolf's body with them. When he awoke and tried to run away, the stones were too heavy so he fell down at once and died.

All three were quite delighted. The huntsman skinned the fur from the wolf and went home with it. The grandmother ate the cake and drank the wine that Little Red Cap had brought, and soon she regained her health. Meanwhile, Little Red Cap thought to herself, never again will you stray from the path by yourself and go into the forest when your mother has forbidden it.

It is also related that once when Red-Cap was again taking cakes to the old grandmother, another wolf spoke to her, and tried to entice her from the path. Red-Cap, however, was on her guard, and went straight forward on her way, and told her grandmother that she had met the wolf, and that he had said 'good-morning' to her, but with such a wicked look in his eyes, that if they had not been on the public road she was certain he would have eaten her up. 'Well', said the grandmother, 'we shall shut the door, that he may not come in.' Soon afterwards the wolf knocked, and cried: 'Open the door, grandmother, I am little Red-Cap, and am bringing you some cakes.' But they did not speak, or open the door, so the grey-beard stole twice or thrice around the house, and at last jumped on the roof, intending to wait until Red-Cap went home in the evening, and then to steal after her and devour her in the darkness. But the grandmother saw what was in his thoughts In front of the house was a great stone trough, so she said to the child: 'Take the pail, Red-Cap; I made some sausages yesterday, so carry the water in which I boiled them to the trough.' Red-Cap carried until the great trough was quite full. Then the smell of the sausages reached the wolf, and he sniffed and peeped down, and at last stretched out his neck so far that he could no longer keep his footing and began to slip, and slipped down from the roof straight into the great trough, and was drowned. But Red-Cap went joyously home, and no one ever did anything to harm her again. (pp. 139-141)

The Complete Grimms Fairy Tales. (1975). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

An Oral Version of Red Riding Hood.

There was a woman who had some bread. She said to her daughter "Go carry this hot loaf and a bottle of milk to your granny."

So the little girl departed. At the crossways she met bzou, the werewolf, who said to her: "Where are you going?"

"I'm taking this hot loaf and a bottle of milk to my granny."

" What path are you taking," said the werewolf, "The path of needles or the path of pins?"

"The path of needles," the little girl said.

"All right then, I'll take the path of pins."

The little girl entertained herself by gathering needles. Meanwhile the werewolf arrived at the grandmother's house, killed her, put some of her meat in the cupboard and a bottle of her blood on the shelf. The little girl arrived and knocked at the door.

"Push the door,' said the werewolf, "It's barred by a piece of wet straw."

"Good day, Granny. I've brought you a hot loaf of bread and a bottle of milk."

"Put it in the cupboard, my child. Take some of the meat which is inside and the bottle of wine on the shelf."

After she had eaten, there was a little cat which said: "Phooey! ... A slut is she who eats the flesh and drinks the blood of her granny."

"Undress yourself, my child," the werewolf said, "And come lie down beside me."

"Where should I put my apron?"

"Throw it into the fire, my child, you won't be needing it any more."

And each time she asked where she should put all her other clothes, the bodice, the dress, the petticoat, and the long stockings, the wolf responded:

"Throw them into the fire, my child, you won't be needing them any more."

When she laid herself down in the bed, the little girl said:

"Oh, Granny, how hairy you are!" (continued page 65)

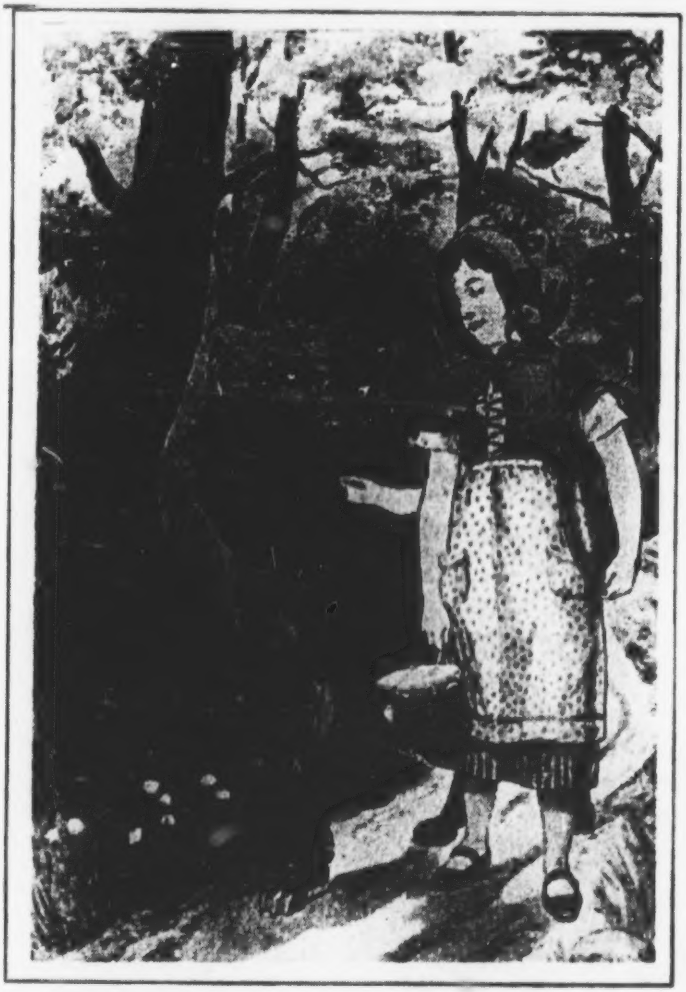
Figure 4.

Father Tuck's Fairy Tale Series, *Little Red Riding Hood*, London: Raphael Tuck & Sons, c. 1880. Illustrator: unknown.

The better to keep myself warm, my child!"
Oh Granny, what big nails you have!"
"The better to scratch me with, my child!"
" Oh Granny, what big shoulders you have!"
"The better to carry the firewood my child!"
Oh Granny, what big ears you have!"
"The better to hear you with my child!"
Oh Granny, what big nostrils you have!"
"The better to snuff my tobacco with, my child!"
"Oh Granny, what a big mouth you have!"
"The better to eat you with, my child."
"Oh Granny, I've got to go badly. Let me go outside."
" Do it in the bed, my child!"
"Oh, no, Granny, I want to go outside."
"All right but make it quick."
The werewolf attached a woollen rope to her foot and let her go outside.
When the little girl was outside, she tied the end of the rope to a plum tree in the courtyard. The werewolf became impatient and said: 'Are you making a load out there? Are you making a load?'
When he realized that nobody was answering him, he jumped out of bed and saw that the little girl had escaped. He followed her but arrived at her house just at the moment she entered.

Carter, Angela. (Ed.) (1991). *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales.* London: Virago Press.

Figure 5.



Le petit Chaperon Rouge, Paris: Emile Guérin, c. 1905. Illustrator: unknown

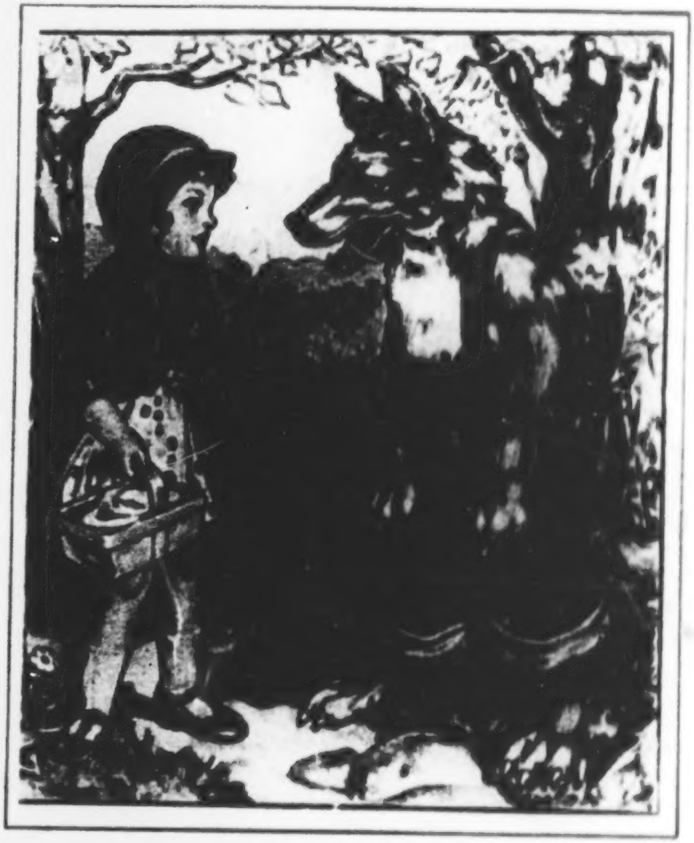
Red Riding Hood: A Politically Correct Version

> The following is a brief excerpt from *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*. The full text can be found at the following website:
> http://www.amber.ucsf.edu/~ross/hood.txt

There was once a young person named Red Riding Hood who lived with her mother on the edge of a large wood. One day her mother asked her to take a basket of fresh fruit and mineral water to her grandmother's house - not because this was womyn's work, mind you, but because the deed was generous and helped engender a feeling of community. Furthermore, her grandmother was not sick, but rather was in full physical and mental health and was fully capable of taking care of herself as a mature adult.
So Red Riding Hood set of with her basket through the woods. Many people believed that the forest was a foreboding and dangerous place and never set foot in it. Red Riding Hood, however, was confident enough in her own budding sexuality that such obvious Freudian imagery did not intimidate her.

(pp. 1-4) Garner, James Finn. (1994). *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*. New York: Macmillan Publishing.

Figure 6.



***Little Red Riding Hood*, New York: Sam'l Gabriel Sons. Illustrator: unknown.**

Notes

1. All the illustrations come from *Don't Bet on the Prince* by Jack Zipes (see References).
2. The subject 'Stories Tell Themselves' will be available in February 1998 in open learning mode. For further information on this module booklet, contact the publishers, Open Training Services (OTS) at Western Melbourne Institute of TAFE.

Developing Critical Writing Practices in a Community Education Setting

Barbara Kamler
Deakin University, Burwood

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Introduction

The writing of personal narratives and life stories has been a common literacy practice in community education settings. A number of valid arguments have been put forward for this practice, including the need for adult learners to write about what they know and to read texts that resonate with their own experience. A pedagogy based on the production of texts of personal experience is seen to be empowering, it is argued, because adult learners are motivated to read such texts and in time come to regard their own experience and its various textual representations as significant.

In this article I wish to acknowledge the power of such writing rather than abandon it, a position seemingly authorised by recent vocational training agendas and competency based frameworks. I would argue, however, the importance of relocating personal writing within a critical literacy framework which connects issues of power with the teaching of writing. A great deal of recent work in Australia has focused on developing critical reading practices (e.g. Mellor, Patterson & O'Neill 1991), including strategies of discourse critique, development of 'multiple reading positions as instructional activity', and 'disciplined reading against the grain of a canonical textual corpus' (Freebody, Luke, Gilbert 1991). By contrast, little attention has been given to developing critical writing practices.

A major limitation of dominant approaches to personal writing is that the personal remains untheorised and read as an authentic expression of an inner self, rather than as a cultural representation. Teachers are frequently encouraged to cultivate the expression of the writer's individual voice, but rarely is that voice located within larger social and cultural constructs (Dixon 1995) and seen to contribute to and reproduce social injustices (Gilbert 1993b). While voice has held a central place in feminist theory and practice as a means of empowerment for women (Luke 1995), a focus on voice does not in itself constitute a critical approach if the networks of power which are sustained and brought into existence by student writing are ignored and students construct, for instance, gendered representations of personal experience (Kamler 1994) and masculinist discourses of violence in their texts (Gilbert 1993a) without critique.

Voice is not an apolitical notion. We come to voice as subjects engendered in networks of class, gender, race and ethnicity (Brady and Hernandez 1994). Thus the kind of writing practices we develop to encourage voice cannot be disengaged from relations of power. Nor can we simply acknowledge that voices are multiple and celebrate the differences we see. Differences do not just peacefully coexist without a struggle over meanings and representations. Central questions underlying difference must be raised. 'Whose knowledge is revered? Whose histories are legitimated? Whose voices are silenced?' (Brady and Hernandez 1994:330).

Given current educational discourses of training and competency, which would ignore power and valorise rigid curricula, Sanguinetti (1993:19) argues it is more important than ever 'to reclaim and retheorise empowerment within an adult education pedagogy.' In this light, my concern is to develop critical writing practices which frame empowerment as both individual and social, personal and political, and which do not valorise the writer's voice as an idiosyncratic interpretation of experience separate from the social and collective enterprise. I would ask what does it mean to 'voice' or 'come to voice' in a culturally critical way? Relocating personal writing within feminist and poststructuralist understandings of language and discourse (Davies 1994, Walkerdine 1990, Gilbert 1993a, Kamler 1996, in press) provides one answer. It is an answer, however, which requires different and more critical understandings of language and the individual than typically inform writing workshop practices.

Stories of Ageing

To develop more critical ways of working with the personal, I have been working with women 60-90 in community settings to produce 'stories of ageing'. The writing is part of an ongoing collaborative research project with my colleague Susan Feldman, Director of the Alma Unit on Women and Ageing, Melbourne University. To date we have conducted three workshops - two in Melbourne, one in Perth - with 50 women of white middle to lower-middle class Eastern European and Anglo Celtic origins. The women's stories provide the data of the project, a way of understanding ageing from the point of view of those experiencing it. In return, they engage with us as researchers and one another to learn new strategies for developing and crafting their writing.

The purpose of the writing workshops is to confront the negative images of ageing pervasive in our culture, and to provide an opportunity for older women to explore in writing how their stories might challenge and disrupt conventional storylines of women and ageing. Our aim is to produce what Bronwyn Davies (1994) calls 'collective biography': stories of each woman's experience which speak to larger cultural issues shared by women engaged in the process of ageing. Within such a pedagogy, autobiography is not an end in itself but a means to developing a collective understanding of the discursive processes that have shaped ageing women. Through the process, women can, according to Davies (1992:83-84), 'examine the construction of their own biography as something at the same time experienced as personal and their own - woven out of their body/minds - and yet visibly made out of, even determined by, materials and practices not originating from them.'

Our research method calls on memory work as developed by Frigga Haug (1987), a method of inquiry which is collective and deconstructive, where the subjects become co-researchers, producing data in the form of stories and subjecting these data to a progressive critical process of reading and theorising. Our work differs from Haug in that we work for a much shorter period of time with women who do not identify as academic or feminist and we sometimes set writing topics on particular themes that emerged from our discussions. While the stories become the central data of the study, a collective process of questioning and interaction is used to enable participants to write and analyse their own and others' stories, with all participants actively participating in the research analytic process.

In the remainder of this paper, I examine how the workshop practices operate to help writers critically reflect upon their writing and move beyond present emphases on the writer's personal voice (e.g. Macrorie 1980, Murray 1982). I illustrate the power of the strategies used by presenting three stories written by older women to explore the ways in which the personal can be framed critically.

Developing critical understandings of language

In the workshops we worked hard to develop critical understandings of language as representation - not as an expression of unique individuality, but as constructing the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific (Weedon 1987:21). From this perspective, individuals do not simply express a unitary or received identity; rather they are produced as a nexus of subjectivities, in relations of power which are constantly shifting, rendering them at one moment powerful and at another powerless (Walkerdine 1981:3).

In writing it is possible to identify a variety of subject positionings taken by writers within the discourses and practices in place in particular social sites. The process of writing and analysing stories can therefore reveal the discursive constitution of selves, and enable an awareness of the contradictory nature of the realities one has taken on as one's own (Davies 1994). In this sense, the personal is a starting place rather than an endpoint, not simply a way to valorise the individual experience but to locate it in larger cultural and social contexts, critically and collectively.

One way we tried to interrupt the women's comfortable and practiced ways of telling about their experience was to follow Haug's (1987) procedure of writing in the third person, as if the story were about someone else. We encouraged the women to write with detail and without judgment, but to locate that experience in a social context and attend to relations of power. While some women found the third person too alienating and used first person instead, the attention to textuality and crafting, rather than personal expression, enabled them to treat experience as text, as a representation that could be reshaped in interaction and analysis and therefore changed.

A story by a woman I will call Janet illustrates the power of this third person strategy.

> She felt the throb of the music through the pavement as she walked aimlessly through the outer city streets. Like a background to her thoughts the tune blended into her subconscious and she found herself repeating the phrase in rhythm to the beat. . .'You wouldn't have a clue. . .you wouldn't have a clue. . .'
>
> They had been arguing again and this time she had to admit to herself that he had been right. He had accused her of becoming dowdy. Maybe it was because he had been in the company of younger people that day when, as a volunteer guide, he taken a group of aspiring lab students over the ice cream factory where he had worked until retirement.
>
> He had come home as usual about six o'clock and found her finishing the ironing in the laundry. She looked tired in spite of having had a fairly uneventful day. The dress she wore was at least ten years old, a faded Osti she had brought at a Coles sale. She couldn't throw it away because it was so comfortable. Her hair was still in rollers simply because she had forgotten to take them out and her glasses were smudged with tiny specks of Fabulon. The well-worn fluffy slippers protruded from under the ironing board where the cat had positioned itself against the pink fur.
>
> She looked up and smiled at him, asked him how his day had been.
> 'Alright,' he said.
> He seemed to be looking at her in a new light.
> 'How long have you had that dress?' his eyes seemed to say. But his voice said 'Don't you like that dress I bought you for your birthday?'
> 'Of course I do - why?'
> 'Well you never wear it.'
> 'What - around the house?'
> 'Why not - you never go anywhere.'
>
> There was an edge of irritation in his voice and she found herself taking a

defensive position. She rested the iron in its cradle and turned off the switch. She wondered what had brought on this somewhat critical attitude towards her appearance. As he followed her back into the kitchen, he watched her still shapely buttocks moving beneath the fabric of the old blue frock. He wished she would wear a belt to define her trim waist.

'That dress I bought you has a belt. Is that why you don't wear it?' he asked.

She was getting annoyed. He's going to keep on about it, she thought. She tapped instructions into the microwave and headed for the bathroom hoping to escape further interrogation.

But he was warming up to the subject. She stepped out of her clothes and turned the shower on while he stood outside the partly closed door and continued the tirade. Through the drumming of the shower she caught snatches of commentary: 'Old fashioned . . . too conservative . . . time you spruced yourself up a bit . . .' Then when no response was evoked . . . 'You wouldn't have a clue . . .'

The microwave beeped five times and he went to retrieve whatever she had prepared for dinner.

She stepped out from the shower and towelled herself dry. Then in a kind of daze she opened the wardrobe door and automatically reached for her old chenille dressing gown. His words were still in her ears ... 'spruce yourself up a bit ...'

She swept the gown on its hanger to the side and withdrew the frock he had given her. The soft blue silk slid easily across her fingers. She put it on over her best underwear, not really knowing what her intentions were. She removed the rollers and reflected that her loose hair softened her face. She held the comb in mid air in a moment of indecision then swept her hair back in a neat bun. After all she was sixty-five.

With his comments still echoing in her head, she walked out the front door and strolled aimlessly towards the outskirts of the city. She paused at a shop window and saw the severe reflection of her face in the glass. The music was getting through her now. She removed the hairpins from her bun and loosened her hair. It fell in soft cascades to her shoulders and she smiled at the effect.

Without really knowing why, she sought out the source of the music and found herself entering a brightly lit dance hall. Before she knew it someone had grabbed her hand and pulled her into a congo line. She was swept along in a throng of laughing, dancing people. The blue dress floated prettily as she held

> the waist of the person in front of her. She felt a pair of hands on her hips and laughed inwardly as she let herself go with the magic of the moment.

Janet's attention to detail is powerful: the faded Osti, the fluffy pink slippers, the sensuous blue silk create a vivid scene of everyday experience. The text places her appearance under scrutiny by positioning the reader to take on the critical gaze of the husband. Yet she plays with the cultural judgement being made of her: she refuses the husband's interrogation but uses it to break free - to find pleasure in her own body and sensuality and join others who allow her movement and celebration.

Women such as Janet are not academic feminists and did not engage in poststructuralist readings on discourse, language and subjectivity, as often occurs in studies which utilise variations of memory work (Haug 1987, Davies 1994, Kippax 1988). Nevertheless, as Janet's text illustrates, they found ideas such as multiplicity and shifting power relations empowering in helping them regard their experience as discursively produced, and their subjectivities as contradictory and therefore open to change.

Asking critical questions of writing

To move writers from personal autobiography to collective biography required group interaction, discussion and a critical questioning of the writing. We adopted common workshop practices of reading and responding to one another's text in group settings or conferences. Our aim, however, was to ask a different set of questions which were informed by our theoretical framework - to start with a positive response to the text but to dislocate it from the personal. That is, we did not ask 'which part did you like best' or 'what person did you identify with' or 'how did you feel about the writing'? as often occurs in writing process workshops. We tried not to highlight how the reader responded to the writer's life, but rather to keep the focus on the textual practice not the person, on the writing as a representation. Some of our questions included the following:

1. *What was powerful in the writing? Identify an image, line, metaphor, or representation of person that was powerful.*
2. *What was omitted? Who/what was absent and/or hinted at or over generalised?*
3. *What cliches have been used to gloss over experience, facts, feelings?*
4. *What doesn't fit? What contradictions, if any, emerge?*
5. *What aspects/issues of ageing are constructed/concealed?*
6. *What are common issues, experiences, storylines the texts have in common?*

A focus on image or metaphor was important to keeping the focus on language as construction, on the choices made and the fact that these were selections. The questions which focused on contradiction and absence, however, were particularly powerful in shifting the focus from the personal to the social.

When we introduced such questions, the women did not simply comply but asked hard questions. What did we mean by 'absence' anyway? There was to be no fancy post-structuralist posturing and happily we were able to use their writing to illustrate. When we explained to one group, for example, that they had been writing for three weeks and not one text made any reference to any aspect of their ageing bodies, they understood this as a culturally situated absence which they were interested to explore in subsequent texts.

A lively discussion followed which named some of the cultural practices which construct ageing women as invisible. Discussion focused on the women *not* feeling old, *not* looking their age, and the discrepancies between the way they looked and felt. In order to help the women find language to talk about their ageing bodies outside the stereotypes, we set a writing exercise 'When I look in the mirror I see', and asked them to describe the physical, to focus on what they did see, rather than on what they did not. Thus, the initial question on absence generated a critical dialogue and new texts which could be located within a number of marginalising cultural practices (Kamler and Feldman 1995), as the following story by Ruth illustrates:

> Basically I'm a slob. I'm happiest wearing clothes that are two sizes too big for me thus eradicating the constant preoccupation with losing weight. Add to this the fact that I take longer to reach decisions and my movements are slower and you can begin to realize that getting ready to go out has become a major operation. Years ago, the phone would ring and ten minutes later I would be out the door showered and dressed. Nowadays, I need plenty of notice and at least an hour's preparation time before I can face the world.
>
> First there is the hair. My hair is white-grey and short and therefore the timing of the haircut becomes crucial. A day too late, it looks straggly and a day too early, it's tough looking. The hair cut needs precision timing, making appointments and then meeting that time whether you feel like it or not. One does not annoy one's hairdresser. Too much hangs on his good humour. He has such easy methods of punishing those who cross him; he holds the scissors after all.
>
> Then there is the waxing. That's a weekly affair. Nature is perverse; while other parts of the body are shedding hair at an alarming rate, the chin blooms with increasing rapidity. Where facial hair is concerned, minutes count. What in the morning appears to be virgin chin, suddenly sprouts fine little ringlets by the afternoon. These little treasures require the assistance of my strongest glasses plus a proper magnifying mirror and just the right light. If the sun is not out, forget it, I can't find them. I console myself with the belief that my friends' eyesight is no longer what it was either.

> So now assuming these two matters are more or less within acceptable limits, there is still the eternal question of what to wear. It serves me right for bingeing on those two buckets of ice cream this week. I won't fit into those new slacks now, that's for sure, and if they don't fit I can't wear my favourite jumper. The other pair of slacks which are a size larger don't go with any of my jackets. How complex it all is. I slam shut the cupboard door in frustration. It doesn't help, I simply must make a decision. But there's the rub.
>
> It has become increasingly difficult to make decisions. Added to this is the knowledge that I'm basically the wrong shape for the times. After much teeth gnashing, I throw an ill-assorted mess on the bed and hope for a miracle. Unsatisfactory as it may be, it obviates the need for decision making.
>
> Finally, I'm into the make up. It's really a put on and wipe off exercise. I need an even colour to hide the brown spots and at the same time I know that too much camouflage brings the 'older woman' perilously close to looking like a clown. The application of make up requires patient loving care, a good dose of vanity and most importantly the belief that it will help. More often than not, rather than deal with this trauma, I opt for the natural look and smear some moisturizer on my face. Who am I kidding? By this time I look like a grease pot, oil leaking from the too open pores. Much blotting with tissues ensues.
>
> At last I'm answering the door. I can read the disapproval on my friend's face. She is desperately trying to find something nice to say about the way I look. It's not easy for her, I can sense that, and feel sorry for her, for suddenly I don't really care that much anyway. It's a liberating feeling.
>
> I'm going out with a friend to see a good film and perhaps dinner afterwards. We will chat and argue over countless events, books and family. We will feel stimulated and alive. Perhaps the passion does not reach the dizzying heights of a time now past, but it will warm and sustain us nevertheless.

Ruth's humorous story shows a woman dealing with the absurdity of bodily changes she cannot control. It plays with and disrupts the cultural understanding that a woman who has lost her looks is a disability. We see the ageing woman positioned within discourses of femininity and youth; we see her struggle with cutting, waxing and plucking her body to fit the ideal, but we know her commitment is only partial.

What the writing provides is a discursive space for Ruth to look at this change while staying separate from it. In that space, she positions her reader to laugh both at the conventions and at her feeble attempt to conform to them. She forces us to see the hair on her chin, rather than giving us leave to notice those hairs and impose the usual negative cultural judgement. Through her attention to detail, she exposes our complicity as women in trying to control our ageing body parts, while acknowledging the contradictions in doing so, the pleasure and the pain.

Developing political and collective purposes for writing

The purpose of the workshops was clearly articulated as a social and political project which aimed to disrupt negative and limiting storylines of ageing. We worked hard to establish a shared sense of purpose that encompassed the individual but went beyond her - that relocated personal texts in the social and cultural practices in which they are embedded. Such purposes are often absent in adult workshop settings where student language is treated as neutral or where the personal is used primarily as a motivation to lure students into learning to write and read text.

Our purposes, however, were feminist and transformative and we were explicit about these. As workshop leaders, we took seriously the fact that there are presently few storylines available to women outside traditional narratives of lost youth and physical deterioration; we looked to the women to provide alternative storylines which could sit alongside and challenge dominant representations. Our aim was also to teach the women strategies to help them make their writing more effective, but such writing purposes were always framed within our larger social purposes.

The workshops were successful to the extent that the women used our resources to build a politics of their own. That is, our sense of purpose was taken up by group members but transformed by them. It was the women, for example, who taught us that ageing is a continuum, characterised by diversity and difference. Through their writing and discussion, they refused the cultural construction of older woman as an undifferentiated category - as 'other'. Furthermore, they challenged our romantic tendency as workshop leaders to valorise the positive aspects of ageing, to replace images of weakness with images of courage, hopelessness with optimism, powerlessness with power. They refused to create new images of superageing, where storylines of fit, creative, physically active, adventurous ageing become the new unachievable oppression. (Feldman and Kamler 1996). Ageing was not one thing or the other; it encompassed a multiplicity of positions some of which were not pleasant.

I can best exemplify the critical and transformative possibilities of such purposes by concluding with Bella's story about her husband's death. Her story is important because it illustrates the fine line that sometimes exists between relocating personal experience within social and cultural frameworks and the intensely personal and emotional nature of reconstructing personal experience.

Bella entered the writing workshop a woman in grief. Her husband had died 13 months earlier and each week she cried easily. During one workshop, our focus was on teaching the power of detail in writing. Bella said she couldn't write because every topic she chose made her cry. I asked her to choose something that gave her happiness. Her grand-daughter Talia, she said, made her happy. As a warm up to the writing, I asked Bella to tell me details about Talia's age, appearance, and a happy time they had shared together. Bella began a lively narrative but within minutes was crying. 'I miss her', Bella explained. 'She lives in Israel and I never get to see her.'

I acknowledged that Bella was in mourning and asked if she would consider writing about her husband's death, as the act of writing would probably not be any more difficult than her present pain. She agreed to try but I was totally unprepared for what occurred at the next session. For Bella had not only written, but seemed physically transformed. The black circles engrained in her cheekbones had lifted, her eyes were alive, her white streaked hair was pushed back from her face with a dramatic flair. I must have stared for she announced as I entered the room, 'I know this writing is not supposed to be therapy, but for me it was therapeutic.' She insisted on reading her text aloud to the group even though she knew she would cry.

> It was late Friday afternoon and the sun was going down. I set the table for Shabbat. The white tablecloth, the candles, the Israeli Shabbat plate Irene gave us, the velvet cover for the challot. Sam watched as I went through the ritual of lighting the candles and we wished each other Shabbat Shalom. I knew he was pleased.
>
> We started our last meal. He ate the fish our friend Sula had cooked his favourite way. He enjoyed eating it and had to ring to thank her. For the rest of his last conscious evening he was his usual sweet self. We sat at the table and talked. He was sorry for losing his patience earlier and apologised. He was frightened of losing his mind and please would I forgive him. I hugged him and reassured him I was with him in whatever he did.
>
> He went to bed. I gave him his sleeping pill and as every night before falling asleep he said, 'Darling another day together - thank you.' We kissed and soon he was asleep. I read for a while and went to sleep next to Sam.
>
> When I woke up some time later, Sam was laying across my bed - he could not move or talk, he just looked at me with wide opened eyes. I tried to shift him but could not do it. A nurse arrived and we put him back in his bed. He was conscious and restless. The doctor ordered a Valium injection which calmed him down and he fell asleep.
>
> When he awoke on Saturday morning, he was conscious and responded to requests, but did not speak any more ... I knew that he was dying and that I could

> not do more than stay with him. I was calm. I knew that this was the end and that these moments would stay with me as long as I lived. I needed to remember every one of them, every breath, every change. I lay next to him fully dressed and watched him. I called his name. He opened his eyes - he could hear me. His mouth was dry and I put some soothing lotion on it. I listened to his breath, felt his pulse, touched his body. I lost sense of time and space. I felt removed from everything and everybody. There was only Sam and I. I remember his breath becoming slower, the silences becoming longer and then it stopped. Sam was dead.
>
> I touched his face and kissed him. He was warm and soft. I do not remember crying. I stayed alone in the room until he was taken away. The last I saw of Sam was the long plastic black bag in which he was carried out. Somebody tore the blouse I was wearing. I was left alone. There was nothing for me to do; Sam had arranged all the formalities ahead of time. I vaguely remember the funeral. I felt and still feel that part of me died with Sam.

The group was deeply moved by Bella's writing. The images are soft and romantic, there is a tenderness in lying beside Sam, a sensuousness in the soothing lotion, in touching his soft skin and in the final kissing which are not simply the anguished howl of a grieving widow. The story, however, is not simply an outpouring of self; it is a crafted and patterned text. It constructs the passing of life within a loving relationship as another kind of intimacy.

Bella's writing, however, presented a challenge in terms of our goal of separating the writer's personal life from its textual representation, for Bella was, so to speak, enmeshed and indistinguishable from her text. The writing allowed her to construct in detail her positioning as grieving widow, to experience it fully while simultaneously separating out from it on the page. Reading her story out loud brought gasps of comfort and support from the women, an appreciation of her courage and an absolute inability of the group to engage with the critical questions we had asked them to use.

Treading the line between personal autobiography and cultural biography, I asked Bella if she wanted to treat this writing as text, as an object which we could ask questions of and interact with critically. Clearly there were absences in her text that could be addressed - its primary focus on the husband's goodness and kindness and the lack of naming of the wife's generosity and loving contribution; the woman's dependence on a husband so that 'there was nothing left for me to do'. To my surprise, Bella said yes. The writing was therapeutic, as she had said, but she wanted more. In subsequent weeks Bella made further changes to her text, the most interesting of which was the addition of a final line which constructs agency in accomplishing a peaceful death for her husband.

> If there is anything that lessens my pain, it is the feeling that my being with him till the end gave him the strength he needed, and that he died surrounded by love and care.

Bella's story highlights the possibilities of developing critical writing practices which do not simply valorise the expression of inner feelings, but which use those feelings to move beyond a set of cultural judgments which determine she is now less than she was when her husband was alive.

Clearly, writing the story made a difference for Bella physically, emotionally, intellectually. In this sense it was therapeutic. But it also created a discursive space for her to explore her loss on paper, so that she was freed in subsequent weeks to construct a variety of positionings in text other than the grieving widow. Importantly, the text also accomplished a repositioning of Bella within the group and empowered her to become a more energetic group member and critical reader of others' texts.

Conclusion

The critical workshop practices employed in this voluntary, adult, community context may have implications for other teachers working in adult education settings with autobiographical texts. To relocate personal writing within broader social, cultural and political contexts requires, as Jarratt (1991) points out, a new theoretical framework with a more carefully theorised understanding of the personal and of the multiple forms of power reproduced in writing. Such a reframing will require, at the very least, a reconceptualisation of the individual writer's voice, the kinds of questions we ask of text, and the kinds of purposes writing might serve.

Barbara Kamler is a Senior Lecturer in Language and Literacy Education at Deakin University, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in writing pedagogy, language and gender and critical discourse analysis. She is a current recipient of a three year Australia Research Council Grant with Terry Threadgold (Monash University) and Susan Feldman (Melbourne University) called Stories of Ageing. This research project works with women 70-85 in writing and video workshops to examine the construction of cultural narratives of ageing. She is the author of *Shaping up Nicely: The Formation of Schoolgirls and Schoolboys in the First Month of School* (with R. Maclean, J Reid and A. Simpson, DEET 1995). She is the editor of two recent collections, *Something that Happens to Other People: Stories of Women Growing Older* (with S. Feldman and I. Snyder, Random House, 1996) and *Constructing Gender and Difference: Critical Research Perspectives on Early Childhood* (Hampton Press, 1998 in press). Barbara's work over the past ten years on writing pedagogy is the subject of a new book entitled *Relocating the Personal: A Critical Writing Pedagogy* to be published by SUNY Press in 1998.

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'We have to learn to say things very clearly ...'

Michele Lucas
Kangan Batman Institute of TAFE

Introduction

The claims for critical literacy practice are wide reaching and critical literacy theorists would have us believe much about the capacity of such practices to transform our learners. Such claims are persuasive, yet in our eagerness to explore the power of discursive practices with our learners, we cannot overlook the experience and knowledge of language and discourse that they bring to the classroom.

The following discussion took place in a Return to Study group at a metropolitan TAFE college. The students, all women, ranged in age from eighteen to thirty five. The topic under discussion was the Nadia Maffei court case, where a woman suffering from breast cancer unsuccessfully sued her doctors for negligence.

The discussion flowed freely. While the teacher initiated the discussion with her opening question, there is little need for further intervention as the students manage turntaking collaboratively and a noticeable feature of the discussion is participants tendency to expand, reword and repeat others' ideas to express agreement and solidarity. It is only twice that the teacher refocusses the discussion by posing another question.

Woven through the discussion are the women's narratives of their own experience which make visible their own powerlessness in the doctor/patient relationship. They empathise with Maffei whose experience confirms their own. The binary that emerges in the discussion is interesting to note. The *we* refers to members of the class and women in general and *them* and *they*, refer to the male medical fraternity, who is depicted very clearly as the uncaring other, out of touch with the needs of their women patients.

What emerges during the discussion is the students' refusal to be constituted as powerless and together they rehearse how they can use language to become more assertive and powerful. The students see their potential to become more powerful in the doctor/patient relationship residing in their ability to use language more assertively and explicitly. They rehearse and encourage each other and repeat how they will approach their next appointment.

'We have to learn to say things very clearly. I want ...'
'Yeah, I want this done.'
'I want ... I want ...'

Towards the end of the discussion there is a change. A return to the narrative and the story of one of the students seems to alter the discussion which ends on a note of uncertainty. Despite their hesitation, the students again reiterate their surety that control over the discourse is what gives the user power in a situation. *'But you often feel you can't question them.'*

Transcript of class discussion

The following discussion took place in a language and literacy class. The women participants are discussing the Nadia Maffei case that had received a great deal of publicity the previous weekend. Maffei had unsuccessfully taken to court two surgeons who she alleged had failed to diagnose her breast cancer.

S = student T = teacher

T: *Any comments about this case that we talked about last week? With all the publicity, I'm sure you've got things to say.*

S 1: *She still won still.*

S 2: *Yep.*

S 3: *Yeah.*

S 2: *I think she came out the winner still. Even though she technically lost, I think she came out the winner. Sympathy ... public sympathy is completely on her side.*

S 4: *Definitely!*

S 2: *And people have realised and even one of the doctors, McLeish, this morning. He said that he thinks now other surgeons will take more care perhaps and do biopsies ... where they wouldn't have before. Even if it just feels like a cyst they will do a biopsy. Just going on their experience. He ... he ... he ... was sort of almost saying, "Yeah, we should have done it." That was the impression I got. "We'll do one in future."*

S 1: *She gave him information ... um ... that helped ... um. That her Mum's Mum had had breast cancer and all that. Which means they should've have checked her to make sure, but they didn't.*

S 4: *They did take a ... um ... sample from the lump, but they didn't do anything. They threw it away.*

S 5: *Yeah ... in the bin.*

S 6: *Yeah ... they didn't do anything.*

S 7: *Biopsies ... yeah.*

S 8: *They took it out to ... um ... ease the pain ... the pressure on her breast.*

S 4: *But they could of sent it off.*

S 7: *To help all of the pain the swelling. At least that's what he said.*

S 4: *But they could've sent it off. Wouldn't have hurt him to send it off and get it tested. That wouldn't have hurt.*

S 7: *It was to help with all the pain.*

S 8: *Yeah ... yeah.*

S 7: *The reason he took it out was to stop it hurting.*

(All talk at once. Hard to decipher. Can hear words like *"should've", "could've")*

T: *What about the idea that she said, " I want you to do tests." What sort of control do we have, as patients, in directing our doctors, do you think?*

S 2: *We don't seem to have an awful lot.*

S 4: *That depends on your doctor too. If you get a doctor that treats you seriously and not as a stupid woman- as a hypochondriac- like most of them think women are* (laughs) *then you're right. I mean it took four doctors to get an x-ray on my sinuses.*

S: *Mmm* (assent)

S 4: *'Cos every time I went to a doctor they said that nothing was wrong. I had to go to a female doctor actually to get anything done.*

(Laughter)

S 2: *I think it means that we have to learn to be very assertive. We have to learn to say things very clearly. "I want ... "*

S 9: *Yeah ... I want this done.*

S 2: *I want. I want. I'm going to use that in three weeks time in fact. I had cosmetic surgery ... purely for the heck of it. I had big, puffy, puffy bags under my eyes. So I had them done about two years ago.*

S : *Mmm.*

S 3: *It worked.*

S 2: *It did work, but this one gets infected. It does. I paid $1500 for this and I got no benefits. I saved up and ... I feel entitled to a good job. So I'm going to practise what we've been saying. It's only a minor thing, it's not a lump or a bump. It's not life threatening. Especially when it's a lump, we have to take control of our life and say, "Hey I want it taken out."*

S 9: *I sometimes think that doctors feel they're larger than life ... Um ... they're actually providing a service, but I don't think they see the patient as a customer. They're sort of choosing to go to that doctor. If they don't choose to go to that doctor then that doctor doesn't eat. I don't think they see the patient that way.*

S 7: *Age has a lot to do with it as well and they also probably thought that she was too young to have something like that. They should have realised that she ... even if she is twenty or thirty whatever ... that they have to treat it as ...*

S 9: *But also given her history.*

S 7: *Malignant. Maybe not innocent but only innocent until proven guilty.*

S 2: *Yeah. You treat it as cancer until proven otherwise.*

S: *Yeah ... yeah.*

S 7: *In this case not innocent until proven innocent. The same sort of thing happened to me. The doctor I saw because of a lump ... He did the same to me.*

S: *Mmm.*

S 7: *I saw him because I had a lump. I was bowled over. I was devastated. I saw him* *and he said it was benign. He took it out. A week later I went to get the stitches out. He came back and I can still remember that and said, "How old are you?" like he'd* ***never*** *seen me before. Then he said it wasn't benign.*

S: *Mmm.*

S: *Mmm. Mmm. Goodness.*

(10 seconds silence)

T: *Are we all supporting the woman's claims against the doctors?*

S: *Yeah.*

S 1: *Yeah ... sure.*

S 2: *I think it's really valid. I don't think that we've got any reason to support the doctors. All of us have had a rough deal with doctors over the years.*

S: *Yeah.*

S 1: *Yeah ... sure*

S 2: *They take too much for granted. As X said, they're in their ivory towers with all their academic qualifications. We just ask the questions ...*

S 7: *He's the expert, where else can you go?*

S: *Yeah.*

S: *Mmm.*

S: *Mmm.*

S 8: *They're the top surgeons! But you often feel you can't question them.*

S: *Mmm.*

Michele Lucas has worked for many years teaching language and literacy classes in TAFE, community and workplace settings. She is currently working in the Learning Design Centre at Kangan Batman Institute of TAFE.

Modelling Critical Literacy in Teacher Education

Beverley Campbell
Victoria University of Technology

Introduction

Teacher education provides the opportunity to explore the nexus between theory and practice. Teacher education courses create the context to model practice, which in turn can be used to theorise classroom pedagogy and to stimulate discussion about effective models of teaching and learning. The life-world of the teacher education classroom can also provide opportunity for practitioners to test out their own beliefs and philosophies about effective pedagogy. It is also an opportunity to extend the notion of text to include visual representation in the form of art, film and cartoon, as well as printed text such as milk cartons or tissue boxes alongside more traditional ideas of text such as story books or academic papers.

The purpose of this article is to illustrate some of the concepts which frame the semester long course I taught and which I write about here, called Teaching and Learning in Adult Literacy and Basic Education. It is offered at La Trobe University as part of a Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma in Adult Literacy and Basic Education. One of the main objectives of the course is to theorise methodology or practice. The course is an attempt not just to do activities which teachers might replicate with learners but also to explore the purposes of certain activities and how learning might be achieved in the process. In this article then, I will show how many of the teaching strategies used are ways of showing critical literacy in practice; sometimes they are activities which can be directly translated into the adult literacy classroom and at other times they are activities designed to illustrate particular theoretical points. Part of the exercise and discussion is to explore ways of adapting activities to particular contexts in which different teachers teach.

What is critical literacy?

In the context of systemic linguistics Rob McCormack has this to say about the importance of texts:

> Now, systemicists typically define something by relating it to a range of contexts - contexts around it, below it, or above it, [notice there has not been much attention to 'before' or 'after']. However, in practice we find that the notion of genre is almost never explicated in terms of what is above it. (McCormack, 1993:35)

This quotation needs to be read in context to be fully understood. To deconstruct it or translate it literally is not possible. But the idea of trying to understand something, in this case 'systemic linguistics', without also having an awareness of some of the texts from other contexts which have shaped and contributed to the development of systemics, is helpful in the context of this article to understand how critical literacy has been shaped.

Critical literacy practice parades in many guises, drawing on different sources for its theoretical underpinnings. The implications of the term have a radical agenda. To understand the content of the term requires an exploration of the connections between models and theories of critical literacy, as well as setting the term in the broader context of 'critical'. Its usage and understanding are associated with such terms as social critical theory, critical thinking, critical literacy, critical language awareness and critical pedagogy. The origins of the term come from the thinking of Habermas and the Frankfurt School and have radical implications for education generally, and for adult education in particular. To deconstruct the content of the term 'critical' uncovers ideas of how we are socially constructed by oppressive structures which constrain us. It is a neo-Marxist view of the world which has named the three most embracing and powerfully shaping social structures as those of gender, class and ethnicity. Critical literacy then is a way of using texts to explore how these social influences shape our thinking and our identity and in the process silence particular minority voices.

Newman's (1994) definition of critical theory adds to an understanding of the intentions of critical literacy.

> 'Critical theory' is concerned with far more than analysis or logical thinking. It recognises the influence of cultural values on people's reasoning and acting, and takes into account interaction, insight, feeling, intuition and other non-scientistic ways of knowing. Critical theory envisages forms of thinking in which people not only perceive the world more clearly but also perceive their perceptions of the world. (p44)

Associated with this idea of perceiving the world more clearly or coming to new awareness is an implicit notion of change or transformation. New perceptions lead to social action. From a neo-Marxist point of view the status quo constructed around ideas of gender, ethnicity or class need to be challenged in order to redress the imbalance of power in society.

One of the many roles played by the teacher educator is that of interpreter, offering on the one hand, a range of theoretical materials illustrative of certain concepts and ideas, and on the other hand, providing a range of models of activities which embody these concepts. The main concepts to be discussed in this article are the ideas of conceptual development, of text and the importance of context, and of intertextuality. Underlying all of this is the more embracing term of critical literacy; in many ways the whole course can be seen as an exercise in critical literacy. In outlining the course, the balance is emphasised between the theoretical issues students will encounter through course readings and related discussion, and examples of practice in which they will participate as methodological activities, with the opportunity to reflect on these activities at various stages. During the course we struggle with many academic papers of varying intellectual density and accessibility. By the end of the course we have covered a lot of ground together; we have looked at a range of texts which illustrate intertextuality, we have explored what it means to talk about conceptual development, discourse, metacognition and much more.

An exercise in intertextuality

A bill-board poster, advertising the Gas and Fuel Corporation, shows three pictures, from left to right, a frozen penguin turning into a nun controlling a heating dial. I pass this scene without much thought about the images, the message or even whether it is effective advertising. Then one night on television I see a variation of this advertisement but this time the text is more complex. A priest, presumably a Monsignor or a bishop, walking the cloistered corridors of a convent, tells a companion that he is foregoing his pilgrimage to Ireland because the convent hot water system needs up-grading. He wants to avoid his nuns turning into penguins, as in the poster. As he is talking a bevy of penguins walks past in the opposite direction. Suddenly I have more information to make sense of both these advertisements.

Posters or TV advertisements are not usually cause for further reflection but the connection of these two pictures does make me stop and think; I become aware how much information is needed in the process of interpretation. Alone the poster communicates a limited message; put together with the television ad, the message conveyed becomes more complex in its interplay of symbols and images. Taken for granted in the portrayal of these images are assumptions and understandings of several important factors. Penguins are usually associated with cold climates, conjuring up images of snow and the Antarctic. The advertisement is working on out-moded images of nuns. Not many nuns these days dress in habits of black and white. The connection of nuns and their black and white habits with the nick-name 'penguins' comes from a by-gone era of Catholicism. The image of the priest talking about denying himself a trip to Ireland assumes we are aware of the strong link between the Catholic Church and Ireland.

The advertisements are also working on the consumer's knowledge about the hierarchy and patriarchy of the Catholic Church. That a male, ordained priest is making financial decisions about a hot water service for the nuns belongs to this understanding. Added to these factors, and what the makers of the advertisements cannot know or predict, is what histories and understandings of the Catholic church consumers bring with them, their encounters with nuns, with the church hierarchy, with Irish Catholics. Underlying the whole advertisement is a sense of playfulness, that nobody is expected to take the ad or the antiquated image of the church too seriously.

How is the de-construction of these two advertisements relevant to an article on critical literacy in teacher education? Seeing and making sense of these advertisements calls for interpretation. How do you or I interpret the elements of these advertisements? This whole short exercise is one of interpretation and intertextuality, detailing a complex and complicated process in which we participate countless times a day. The purpose of teacher education is to show how we are all involved in meaning making processes as well as to illustrate different ways the participants in teacher education, in turn, might communicate this to their adult literacy learners.

Intertextuality-piecing the puzzle

> As the pile of correspondence mounted, she (Pelagia) began to feel in danger of finishing up by writing a 'Universal History of the Entire World', because everything connected to everything else in the most elaborate, devious and elegant ways. (Louis de Bernières, 1994:396)

Many teachers live intertextually, always thinking about a text they have read or seen that is appropriate to read in conjunction with other texts they have kept for just such an occasion. To teach by theme is an exercise in intertextuality. Intertextuality is finding connections between texts; the pursuit of building up a picture, creating meaning with the information available at the time. The more information, the more multi-dimensional the picture. Like a detective story the search for one more clue helps to solve the mystery of meaning. A text read one year might make even more sense years later because another text helps to put another piece in the puzzle.

Or intertextuality-identifying the gaps

> Since all meaning is situated relationally - that is, connected and cross-referenced to other media and genres, and to related meanings in other cultural contexts - a critical literacy relies on broad-based notions of intertextuality. (Luke, 1997:10)

Put simply the main idea of intertextuality is that no text is written or read in isolation from other texts, that every text is connected to other texts. We always read in the light of other texts and we always write influenced by other texts we have encountered. This idea is important from a meaning making perspective and from a pedagogical perspective; the more knowledge readers have to bring to the text and the more they know about the context of the text, the more meaning they will have to bring to the text.

But there's more to intertextuality than piecing the puzzle. Another important element in the intertextuality endeavour involves identifying the gaps in the texts, discovering which voices have been silenced. An example: Margaret Wertheim, author of *Pythagoras' Trousers: God, Physics and the Gender War*, (1997) in a rich example of intertextuality, explains how she sets out to write a book on the development of scientific thinking through the centuries. In the process she discovers the strong link between physics and religion; that until relatively recently public education was for males and was mostly provided by males in religious orders, and that 'physics... had *always* been a quasi-religious activity'. By chance she also discovered that the female voice had largely been unacknowledged in the scientific endeavour; even throughout this century women had been barred from 'the "priestly" culture of physics'.

To model this idea of intertextuality, as naming the gaps, I use three texts, three articles, from *The Age* newspaper, written by Kevin Donnelly (*The Age*, 15 August, 1995), Ray Misson (*The Age*, 22 August, 1995) and Terri Threadgold (*The Age*, 10 October, 1995). Donnelly's article was prompted by public response to David's Williamson's play *Dead White Males*. In the course of defending the play he also defends the 'canon of literature', at the same time attacking the notion that everything can be considered text, tissue boxes included, mentioning Ray Misson as a proponent of this view.

Donnelly's article prompted two responses; one was from Ray Misson himself explaining how he came to use the example of tissue box as text to teach the idea of gender being socially constructed and the other was Terri Threadgold's response to the idea of the 'canon' being patriarchal and exclusive in its construction. To make sense of this collection of articles there are many questions which need to be dealt with, including the obvious:

Who is David Williamson?
What is his play Dead White Males about?
What is meant by the 'canon of literature'?
What have tissue boxes to do with the social construction of gender?
What is the social construction of gender?
What more do we need to know to make sense of these texts?
and so on...

Topical issues appear in newspapers, not as isolated articles, but as pieces of writing prompted by an event, which then precipitate other articles giving new information or different perspectives. Important questions to ask always are:

Who is not being represented here?

Are there voices which have been silenced in this debate by more powerful players?'

Conceptual development

Much has been written about reading; how it should be taught, why some people don't learn to read, what makes a good book. A recently released book about reading itself, *A History of Reading* (1996) took seven years to research, in which the author, Alberto Manguel traversed many countries to gather his data. Much has also been written about conceptual development, particularly in relation to children and learning. This article does not attempt to enter into debates about efficacy of some methods over others or of reasons for failure to learn to read. Nor does it want to give a survey of thinking about how conceptual development takes place. Rather this article shows how understandings of reading and conceptual development might be interpreted in a teacher education course to give new insights into reading with adult learners.

Our conceptual development is never-ending; from childhood to old age our understanding of the world is expanded because of what we experience through seeing and learning and reading. Educators of pre-school children talk about how important it is to read to young children for many reasons. Perhaps the most important is because the process of learning to read is about inducting children into the different discourses in which they live and the different concepts which shape society and its culture's thinking and ways of being in the world. Reading is not the only way this might happen but it is a powerful force not to be underestimated.

An example I use to illustrate this idea of learning to read being about learning to think conceptually is to take a children's book, such as the opening sentences from the children's book *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox (1984):

> There was once a small boy called
> Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge and what's
> more he wasn't very old either.
>
> His house was next door to an old people's home
> and he knew all the people who lived there.

Closer analysis shows that there are indeed many concepts on this first page that are taken for granted: small vs. big, boy not girl, old vs. young, the importance of names and naming, Anglo-Celtic names vs. names from other cultures, house vs. home, the notion of 'old people's home', the idea of 'next door' and 'neighbourliness'. Added to the printed words of the text are illustrations which frame the interpretation for the reader. This analysis has only identified the key concepts in the text. Further analysis and discussion would show that there may be vastly different readings or understandings associated with these particular concepts.

Helpful here is Gee's (1990) definition of discourse as:

> ... socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting (as well as reading and writing) that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role' (p 143).

Different groups might have different understandings of some of the concepts illustrated above, depending on the discourses the members of those groups have been socialised into. The process of making and gaining meaning from texts is complex and multilayered. Adult literacy education is about contributing to the conceptual development and extending the discourses of the participants; this is what reading and writing development is about.

A similar exercise based on a series of newspaper articles around one topic becomes a set of texts to be used to create shared meaning and understanding. The selection of articles needs to represent as many different perspectives and points of view as possible: front page news reports, cartoons commenting on the issue, editorial comments, feature articles, letters to the editor. To name an issue positions it in time and to reproduce collections of articles as the definitive answer on the subject is always problematic. The most effective teaching arises in classes where the topic has been identified and negotiated between the teacher and the group. In the past I have used collections of texts based on euthanasia, the construction of freeways through cities, the Stolen Generation, childcare, the Helen Demidenko affair, the sacking of the Auditor-General in Victoria, the closing of a local swimming pool and the wider issue of the sacking of local councils.

The issue often emerges without readers having full knowledge of the background and context to the topic and having a range of texts available serves several purposes; particularly, it helps to identify the key players in the issue, to identify key concepts embedded in certain issues, and to identify gaps in knowledge of the members of the group. But what might be a gap for one member can often be added to by other members of the group. This approach does not guarantee agreement but it goes some way towards helping people see what understandings their points of view are based on. Aileen Treloar (1992) has documented this process in her article *One Text - Many Readings* to show how reading as a social, collaborative process provides more information with which to work in the meaning making process, than a single, individual reader can provide alone.

The selection of appropriate texts in literacy learning continues to be a contentious issue among adult literacy teachers. The comment most often made about newspaper articles containing lots of printed text is 'How can students be expected to make sense of this text when they can't even sound out the words?' What this sort of reading is doing is making use of the reading strategies which learners use in other situations and with other types of texts, with visual texts, with TV programs, with people, with social situations. We guess, skim, scan, predict, jump to conclusions, bring prior knowledge into play in all these situations. Adult learners who live with memories of getting things wrong need to be made aware that they already use reading strategies in lots of other ways to make meaning out of situations. They need to be reminded that experienced readers also often re-visit texts to gain greater depth of understanding. Or they can make more sense of a text on subsequent readings because they have more information to bring to bear on the text or they have become more enculturated into the 'Discourse'. Adult literacy learners live with certain understandings of what reading is; taking a critical literacy approach often involves changing these attitudes.

Adult learners come to learning with certain dispositions in relation to texts, both towards the content of the text and towards the very act of reading, towards the text itself. The teacher herself also comes with certain dispositions towards these things. All these factors are at play whenever the act of reading or writing takes place. It is these dispositions which accompany us all through life; in the course of a lifetime they may be replicated or transformed. This may occur in any situation but adult education provides the context to either replicate dispositions or to offer the possibility of transformation.

An example illustrates this complexity in action. An activity used in the course being described is to use large prints of paintings by Picasso or Breughel or van Gogh to explore the many levels at which a painting might be read and how this parallels the process of reading a printed text. We talk about the content of the painting, the elements which make up the picture, whether the painting has any symbolic representations and how these might be understood, what knowledge of painting people might have and then whether anyone has knowledge of the artist which they use to make sense of the picture. The discussion is always lively and the various interpretations differ from group to group because of the different knowledge participants bring to the activity.

During the break one of the students reported that she felt unable to join in the discussion, because of her initial response; she disliked art and Picasso's art, in particular. As teacher, no matter what I thought about the merits of the exercise, or of the painting, or for what ever reason the student had developed these attitudes towards art, the student was unable to deal with the text. My response is long forgotten but I can only hope that although there was initial resistance to the activity, self-reflection on her response may have changed her attitude to viewing art in the future, even if in a small way. Many adult literacy students have similar responses to various sorts of written texts.

Text and context

The importance of text and context is closely connected with the idea of intertextuality.

The Concise Oxford dictionary defines 'context' as 'parts that precede or follow a passage and fix its meaning'. There are two ways that context will be considered in this section; the first is in relation to text itself and the second is in relation to the way the broader context might influence interpretation of a text. Sometimes it is difficult to separate one from the other.
An understanding of intertextuality recognises that to understand the meaning of texts, it is necessary to look at what comes before the text and what comes after, not only within the text itself but in relation to other pieces. A text becomes increasingly more meaningful, the more a reader encounters other texts which form the context, both in the nature of texts 'above and below' and 'before and after'. This goes some way to explaining why a text which initially is difficult or makes little sense, becomes clearer on subsequent readings. The meaning making process is helped when the context offers a richer variety of markers for the reader to plot the way.

The other way of understanding context is to see that readers themselves create the context for the text. The concept of 'habitus' as developed by the French linguist, Bourdieu, shows how we are socially shaped; the concept is helpful in the context of this article to understand how readers might be influenced in the learning process.

> The habitus is a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are 'regular' without being consciously coordinated or governed by any 'rule'. The dispositions which constitute the habitus are inculcated, structured, durable, generative and transposable ... (Thompson 1991:12)

Part of the challenge of teaching is to explore dispositions towards reading when attempting to engage class participants with the text. Not that there is any certain way of predicting how learners' thinking might be changed because of new ideas they are presented with.

Some important references

As an integral part of the course, a set of course readings is distributed. As part of a course in critical literacy, students are also learning to become critical readers of academic texts. I want to refer to several of these readings to show how they frame and shape the whole course. Two articles on critical literacy, one by Barbara Comber (1992) and one by Colin Lankshear (1994), are read and discussed at length for their ideas on critical literacy itself. They provide accessible overviews of the development of critical literacy including an understanding of the various models or approaches in critical literacy pedagogy.

As well, three examples of Paulo Freire's writing and thinking are considered. Part of chapter three from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) is discussed early in the course as an example of Freire's contribution to thinking about literacy and education. We discuss the literacy campaigns he was instrumental in orchestrating, first in Brazil and then in other South American countries, and his influence on the literacy movement in Australia, following his visit to Melbourne in 1974. Questions which frame the discussion are whether Freire's thinking has been domesticated in its translation into Australian adult literacy education and whether his terms of 'empowerment' and 'conscientization' mean the same thing when they are used by adult literacy teachers in Australia. We look at the language in this early work and the two main influences on his thinking, Christianity and Marxism, as shown in such phrases as:

> Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for men (sic). The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. (p62)

The use of such language in the 1990's functional, pragmatic environment of the vocational educational training agenda sounds strange indeed.

Alongside this we look at a paper by Jill Sanguinetti (1992) in which she discusses Freire's visit to Melbourne in 1974, the extent of his influence and some critiques of his work from a feminist perspective.

The second Freire paper (1983) is a shorter, more personal piece in which he coins his well known phrase 'reading the world and reading the word'. A quote is included here to show how this paper develops this idea which is fundamental to his idea of literacy education.

> Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world. . . this movement from the world to the word and from the word to the world is always present; even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. In a way, however, we can go further, and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing it or re-writing it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious practical work. (p10)

To extend the window on Freire's world we then look at an excerpt from a long interview by Paulo Freire and Donald Macedo (1995) in which they discuss the importance of 'dialogue' in the classroom. According to Freire it is only through dialogue that the pedagogical space is created for transformatory education to happen. Only by reading earlier works of Freire do we come to understand his particular concept of 'dialogue' and what he sees as the potential for genuine dialogue to provide epistemological space in the classroom for transformatory education. The next quote shows his aims for adult education which he believes can only be achieved through 'genuine dialogue'.

> It is impossible to think, however, of overcoming oppression, discrimination, passivity, or pure rebellion without first acquiring a critical comprehension of history in which these intercultural relations take place in a dialectical form. Thus, they are contradictory and part of a historical process. Second, we cannot think of overcoming oppression without political pedagogical projects that point to the transformation or the reinvention of the world. (p395)

We ask of these academic readings questions similar to those we would ask of any other text we read in the classroom:

What prior knowledge might help to make meaning out of this article?
What do you know of the context in which this article was written?
(Both in relation to the journal or book and to the wider educational context.)
How is the writer positioning her/himself in the article?
How is the writer using her/his positioning in the article to position you as the reader?

This list of questions is by no means definitive and can be expanded depending on the text under scrutiny.

Finally in relation to the texts by Freire we consider two further texts. The first comes from the SWAPO (South West African People's Organization) Literacy Promoter's Handbook used in a mass literacy campaign in Namibia in the 1980's. Following a printed message from the President of SWAPO and a foreword by the Namibian Secretary for Education and Culture, we discuss the visual text *Why is literacy important?* (see Figure 1 overleaf) and whether literacy can deliver all that it promises. Based on the Freirian model the handbook shows situations of instruction for teaching 'codes and key words' such as *tatekulu* (grandfather) and *okulima* (till/plough) related to the life of the people. To finish we view the movie of *Stanley and Iris*, starring Jane Fonda and Robert De Niro. Hollywood's contribution to International Literacy Year, it is a particular interpretation of 'the literacy problem' and how it can be cured. One of the assessment tasks for the semester is to write a critical review of *Stanley and Iris*, offering alternative readings to the movie to show how literacy education might link more creatively to Stanley's life.

The art of questioning

Embedded in a critical literacy approach is the important and vital nature of talk. Questions belong to an understanding of the key role of talk in the critical classroom. The art of questioning is paramount in a critical literacy approach and offers the teacher a way of acting as critical interpreter in the educational process. Shore (1994) reports on work she carried out as part of an investigation to look at the way teachers ask

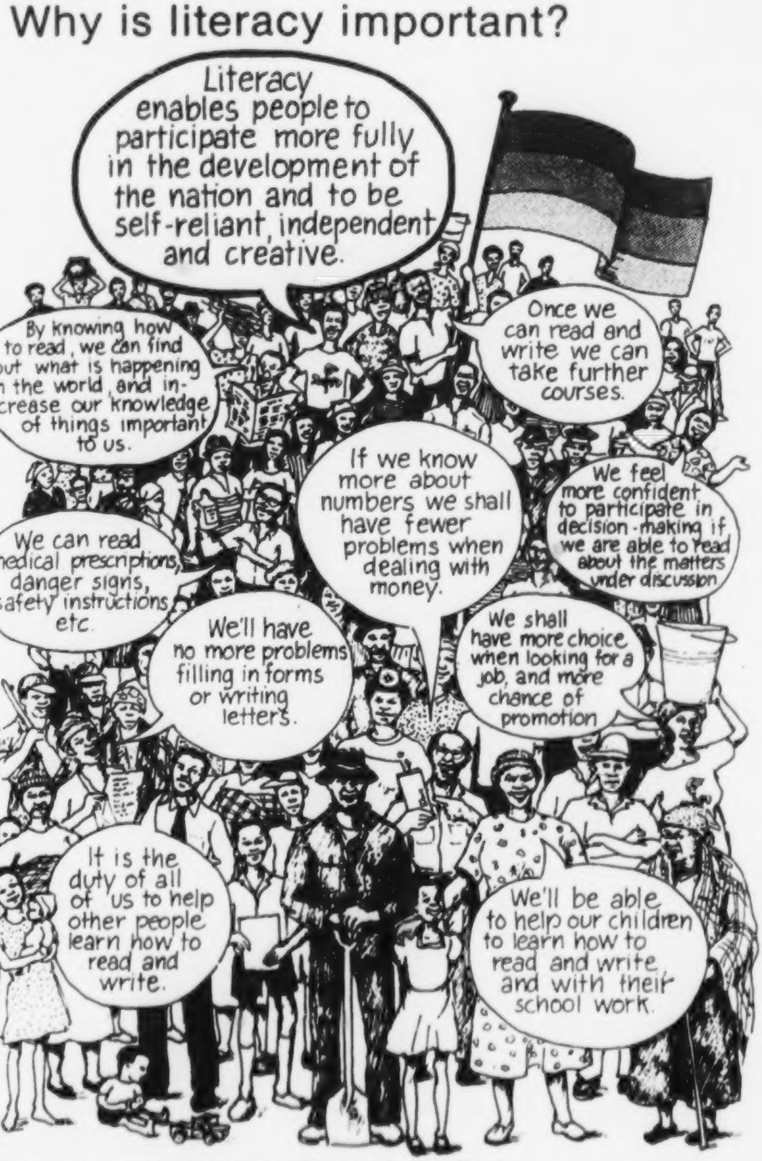
Why is literacy important?
Literacy enables people to participate more fully in the development of the nation and to be self-reliant, independent and creative.
By knowing how to read, we can find out what is happening in the world, and increase our knowledge of things important to us.
Once we can read and write we can take further courses.
If we know more about numbers we shall have fewer problems when dealing with money.
We feel more confident to participate in decision-making if we are able to read about the matters under discussion.
We can read medical prescriptions, danger signs, safety instructions etc.
We'll have no more problems filling in forms or writing letters.
We shall have more choice when looking for a job, and more chance of promotion
It is the duty of all of us to help other people learn how to read and write.
We'll be able to help our children to learn how to read and write and with their school work.

Figure 1. SWAPO Literacy Promoter's Handbook

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questions, the sort of questions they pose in the classroom. Philosophers talk about 'good' questions and 'bad' questions, educationists talk about 'open' and 'closed' questions or 'leading' questions or questions that 'lead nowhere'. Shore's paper focuses on 'the role of teacher questioning in the process of individual and collective change'.

Critical writing

The emphasis in this article is more on reading as a critical literacy pursuit. The issue of critical writing has not been addressed at any length. It is important not to exclude it, however, as there is some innovative work being done in relation to critical writing, which needs to be acknowledged in the context of critical literacy. Some of the literature in this area refers to critical language awareness or cla, an approach which has been developed by a group at Lancaster University, Norman Fairclough (1992) and his work on discourse analysis among them. Ivanic (1994), a colleague of Fairclough's, has explored some critical literacy questions in research she has done in relation to writing: How is the writer being positioned by the genre in which she is having to write? Barbara Kamler, in her article in this volume on re-locating the personal, shows how using a critical approach to the writing of texts goes beyond merely eliciting a personal response in writing to locating the response temporally, culturally and socially.

Some words of caution

Once teachers have developed a critical approach to literacy it will be difficult to teach any other way. In answering the question 'Why Bother? in the title of her article in this volume, Barbara Comber gives many reasons why teachers need to take a critical literacy approach with school students. Equally important is this approach in the adult education context. Advocating this approach does not make it unproblematic, however, and it is important to be aware of some of the pit-falls of teaching critical literacy. Teachers may think it important to problematise texts or to radicalise issues. Many teachers take up a critical position, seeing it as vital in redressing imbalances of race, gender and class. Not all adult learners want to know how certain texts position them as readers or want to be radicalised about current issues. In fact some students resist it strongly recognising the ramifications in their lives if they do. Adopting a critical approach does not necessarily mean that change will ensue. Sometimes the result is that racist or sexist opinions are held more vehemently. Class discussion on such issues can be heated and volatile where holding a public opinion becomes a matter of principle and when values and deeply embedded assumptions are being challenged.

Conclusion

This article has documented parts of a teacher education course aimed at modelling a critical literacy approach, in the doing and in theory. Attempts at documentation of classroom interaction and teaching practice can only hope to convey a glimpse of the multiplicity of responses, the many levels of interaction and the depth of interpretation which all contribute to the dynamism of the classroom. Mostly they do not communicate those times when something does not work, when understanding does not happen or when students do not respond to activities as anticipated. Nor do they communicate a sense of the urgency of the literacy endeavour or even the fun which often permeates the reading of texts in a critical way. When teaching is experiential, it is difficult to know what connections participants are making for themselves throughout the course. This article has presented an overview of parts of a teacher education course as well as show how there is an educational philosophy embedded in the activities, articles and a selection of texts which make up the course. Concepts that make up the course's framework of philosophical understanding such as conceptual development, text and context and intertextuality, Discourse and habitus have been expanded and illustrated. Illustrating with a variety of texts, activities and academic papers, this paper has shown how the intention of a teacher education course is to model critical literacy so that course participants might teach and live more critically.

Beverley Campbell currently works as the coordinator of the Adult Literacy Research Network Node for Victoria (Language Australia), based at Victoria University of Technology. She began her working life as an English and languages teacher in Western Australia and in the early 1980's moved into adult literacy education in Victoria, beginning as a volunteer tutor. Her involvement in the last fifteen years includes adult literacy tutor, tutor trainer, project worker, teacher trainer and researcher. For three years (1998-90) she was the President of the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council. She is the author of *More Than Life Itself: A Handbook for Adult Literacy Tutors* (VALBEC 1992).

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"Despite all my rage, I'm still just a rat in a cage"
The Limits of Critical Literacy

Ray Misson
University of Melbourne

An edited version of this text, printed in full here, was published in *Fine Print*, volume 18, number 3, Spring 1996, with permission.

Introduction

Anyone into popular music will almost certainly recognise my title: it's the beginning of the chorus of one of the best songs that came out last year, "Bullet with Butterfly Wings" by The Smashing Pumpkins, taken from their album *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness.* Those who know the song will know that it starts off comparatively quietly, and then the chorus comes in with a sudden increase in volume and intensity, and with a driving beat. The first time I heard it, I thought, "Wow, what a terrific song", and I found that for the next few days I kept going around singing to myself quietly (but with great feeling), as one does, "Despite all my rage I'm still just a rat in a cage". Then it occurred to me that the words were really quite significant. "Well," I thought, "I rather doubt Billy Corgan intended it when he wrote the song, but this is about critical literacy." It certainly resonated with some of the worries I was having about the critical literacy venture, and that I had begun to write about (Misson 1996). It seemed to provide a good starting point for talking about some of the limits of Critical Literacy.

I use the word "limits" advisedly: I don't mean limitations. I am not wanting to mount a critique of critical literacy. However, I do think it's important to see what critical literacy can do and can't do. Critical literacy has become a kind of talismanic term, trotted out to justify all sorts of practices. It's been promoted as if it were something of a panacea that will solve all social and educational problems. When that kind of thing happens to a useful concept I think it's important (a) to define exactly what one means by it, and (b) to define exactly what one can expect to achieve, and what one cannot, through implementing a program based on it.

I don't want to spend time on the first question here. I suppose I would define critical literacy as something like "a view of language and literacy that recognizes that all language practices are socially grounded and so inherently ideological, and a teaching

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practice that makes students aware of the social and cultural purposes of language use, particularly in terms of ideological positioning." It's the second question about what critical literacy can and can't do that I want to address.

If we think of those words that struck such a chord with me – "Despite all my rage I'm still just a rat in a cage" - the first question one probably asks is, "Who's speaking? Who is this 'I' with all the rage locked up in a cage?" There are two possible answers - in our context anyway - and I want to try them both out. One is that it is the critical literacy teacher; the other that it is the student in the critical literacy classroom.

Let's take them one at a time, starting with the student. There are actually three students that I want you to hear saying those lines, and when we come to the teachers, we will look at the teachers of the three students, and see how the words are relevant to them too.

First student

The first of our students is one who has rage but he has, I think you will all agree, the wrong kind of rage. Let's call him Jason. This is taken from a Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) English 'Presentation of an Issue' response:

> 'Feminism has gone too far'
> How would you like to be told what to do by a man-hating women? Some huge hairy EO enforcer who just cant wait to catch you breaking some little law so she can have you for descrimination? This is what it has come to. They wont leave us alone. Its the fear of every guy in these crazy days of equality. You cant turn round without some regulation hitting you over the head. Being told your not to harrass someone, or that equal pay is there right and you'd better shut up or else. Whats the world coming to....
>
> In the olden days things were easy. Men were breadwinners and women were wifes and mothers. The guy would go out and work hard and the little woman would stay at home with the kids and everyone was happy. It was a great system. Nobody would of thought of changing it but along come the womens movement with bra burning and slogans like ALL MEN ARE RAPISTS and youve got to ask before you touch and pretty soon the government gets into the act and starts legilating so feminism is compolsory. Now its too late. The politicians dont want to lose votes, so they all say what the women want to hear. And we all suffer in silence....
>
> When you ask a girl if shes a feminist she says, 'No way'. Theirs a reason for this. Its because they know the feminists are man-hating wingers who wont be happy till theyve taken over the society and got men exactly where they want them which is doing what there told. Or get rid of men alltogether and have a world of

> women. Talk about brave new world. Concentration camps for men? Brainwashing in school - except we've allready got that. Before that happens therell be another sexual revolution and this time it will the men standing up for there rights and restoring some order...
>
> What has womens liberation ever done for us? Nothing. It only wants to know about one half of the population thats for sure and there are no prises for guessing which one. Whereas we men always wanted there to be two sexes, who would want a world of men. Men have their place and women to, thats the way it should be.
> (McRoberts 1994, pp. 50-52)

Now, I think it is clear that this student is genuinely outraged about what he sees as the unfairness visited on men by feminists, but I doubt many would find his view particularly sympathetic. Indeed, I think most teachers would see him as needing a good strong dose of critical literacy, to show him how he is subscribing to a debased ideology. His rage is the result of limited perception, of being caught in an ideology that is imprisoning him. He is a rat who needs to be got out of his cage as quickly as possible.

One wants to make this student see a lot of things about his attitudes and the way he is using language. It's actually a fascinating piece of writing to analyse because it calls on so many of the strategies of prejudice. There is first of all the caricature of the physically grotesque overpowering feminist: "huge hairy EO enforcer". "Hairy" is of course particularly interesting, because you know he isn't thinking of long blonde hair on the head. Rather he is setting up the image of the undesirable masculinised woman, unnaturally going against both the biological and social order of things.

Then there is the telltale anger about being told not to harass or about the demand for equal pay. "What's the world coming to?" I suspect if you confronted the student with his statement, he would qualify it by saying he just meant the kind of thing he says in the next paragraph, not real harassment, or that he meant affirmative action and not just equal pay, but the blunt statement is surely very revealing. This is a boy who feels deep down that he has the right to harass, the right to preferential treatment, because he is male.

The most interesting thing, though, is the fluctuation in inclusiveness. In the second paragraph quoted, with its nostalgia for the "olden days", first of all, "everyone was happy", Then mysteriously there arises out of nowhere "the women's movement" which seems not to be part of this happy "everyone". The politicians then say what "the women" - presumably all women - want to hear. "And we all suffer in silence," which is a clear case of the inclusive "we" actually excluding women.

In that next paragraph, again there is the interesting categorization of "girls" who you ask if they are feminists, and these other beings, "feminists" who are clearly not "girls". There is also that rather scary, belligerent statement about "restoring some order" which again plays on the idea that people have their rightful place in a natural order, and feminism is therefore unnatural.

And what about feminism only being interested in half the population whereas men are interested in both men and women, as long as they keep in their place?!

I think this would be a splendid text to analyse in terms of the construction of a particular attitude. However, what would you do with this text as a teacher if the student were your student, and he handed it in to you? Under those circumstances, you almost certainly wouldn't feel able to use it as the basis for a class analysis, especially since there is a fair possibility that the text has been handed in precisely to make you angry, to get you to display your own prejudices. We will consider this question later when we come to look at the cages teachers can be caught in.

Second student

The second student - let's call him Daniel - is a much better writer. He is a Year 12 student again, writing a piece intervening in a scenario about discrimination on grounds of sexuality. The scenario outlines how an administrator in a large rural city called Callington had introduced legislation prohibiting discrimination on grounds of sexuality. A rumour has subsequently started that the administrator, Leigh Shannon, is lesbian, and she writes a letter to the paper denying this. From the tasks set, Daniel chose to write a letter to Ms Shannon about the regulation:

> Dear Ms Shannon,
>
> There has been a rather large amount of publicity on your new employment regulation. As a gay man, I wish to commend you on taking a strong stance. Unfortunately I believe that your actions have done more harm than good to the gay community.
>
> As a city of approximately 120,000 people, it is inevitable that there will be some types of discrimination present. I do not believe that we can ever totally free our community from discrimination. What I do know is that we are still part of a very sheltered society, one that prefers not to see or hear things than act on them. By highlighting the plight of gay and lesbian citizens, I cannot see any real benefit as I was under the impression that it was already covered by our legal system. I ask you, Ms Shannon, was this a political stunt or were you truly attempting to help homosexuals?

> For the last five years I have been an employee of the City of Callington. I can honestly say that I have not been subjected to any type of discrimination regarding my sexuality whatsoever. I have chosen to keep my private life and professional life seperate as I believe all people should. Therefore, I cannot see how highlighting antidiscrimination measures for homosexuals is beneficial because your professional life and your ability to do your job has nothing, absolutely nothing to do with your sexual preferences....
>
> You came out recently to categorically deny that you were homosexual. I want to ask you for your motiffs for doing this. If being homosexual should not affect your ability to perform in the workplace why was it essential for you to reaffirm your sexuality to the public. To me, this sounds slightly hypocritical. It goes to show that you need gay people to be in power to handle this problem because unless you've experienced it, it is very hard to fix it.
>
> Ms Shannon, I once again thank you for your interest in homosexuals but please do not use it as a political stunt in future because homosexuals are people and these people are going to feel the brunt of your actions.

I think you will agree that this is an intelligent student, writing very intelligently on a social issue. You may see some limitations in his viewpoint: the arguments are predicated on acquiescence in "inevitable" prejudice, maintaining invisibility, seeing the homosexual as essentially a victim, etc. If it were genuinely a letter from a gay man (and it's a letter I can imagine some gay men of my acquaintance writing) one might, I think, deplore the extent to which he has internalised the heterosexist culture. He is, after all, arguing against the regulation. However, the essay shows an intelligent sense of what it might be like to be a gay man, and makes a dignified statement about prejudice through condescension.

In a follow-up class after they had writien on the scenario, I asked the students if they had genuinely written what they believed, and a lot said no, including Daniel. There was actually a distancing gesture in the text itself, that showed a desire to dissociate himself from the position he had taken. He had signed it:

> Yours sincerely,
> F. Aggot

In the class, I directly picked Daniel up on his statement that he hadn't believed in what he wrote:

RM *Why? ... Why did you write that way?*

D *Easier.*

RM *Why was it easier?*

D *I suppose you could understand it a lot easier, and you could convince someone a lot easier ... and it's very believable. and if it's something you do believe in, and not being able to prove it, you take the easy way out ...*

RM *I'm really interested to know why you feel it's easier. I mean, in some ways there was a lot more material there in the scenario that was antagonistic towards the regulation that you might have picked up, and ... and yet you felt that somehow it was easier. Or actually, probably if the truth was known you felt that I was more likely to be impressed if you ... if you wrote in favour of it. And is that because of a sort of political correctness, you know, that this is kind of a more acceptable attitude?*

D *Yeah.*

RM *Yeah.*

D *Because, now there are things changing and people are more accepting of ... so if you're writing against it more people are likely to go against you.*

So Daniel recognized that it's easier to argue logically a pro-homosexual stance, at least within the current cultural context, but the logic doesn't convince him, which is what one might expect. Such attitudes are not located within the realm of reason.

Daniel knows the game he is playing. He is not like Jason, who even perhaps believes - although I doubt it - the rhetoric that what you have to give in such pieces of writing is your genuine opinion. Daniel knows that, whatever his rage might be, he's a rat stuck in the cage of VCE, and the way to get out of the cage is to forget all about his rage and perform the tricks expected of him, which he does very well. The problem is, of course, that this mimicry is a powerful defence against any real incursions into his beliefs that might dislodge the prejudice. You really wonder what more could be done in a classroom to make Daniel believe in the things that he can so articulately fake. He has learnt the discourse, both of school writing and of politically correct attitudes. The problem here, of course, lies in the extraordinary capacity school has to turn anything into routine, to take the valuable lesson and change it into a trick to perform, whether it be analysing sexist representations in the media, doing resistant responses to texts, or producing anti-discriminatory arguments. It's something teachers have to work very hard against, and inevitably we don't always succeed.

I actually want to be very careful in talking about Daniel, because I think it's too easy on the one hand, to write the letter off and simply agree with Daniel himself about what his "real" attitude is, or, on the other hand, sentimentally take the letter as expressing a deeply-felt sympathy and assume that the attitude in the discussion is purely defensive, put on for the benefit of his macho mates. All the work done on multiple subjectivity warns us against such simplification. The different attitudes can be seen as contextually influenced, if not contextually determined. They can be seen as working from within different discourses, both of which the boy inhabits and which inhabit the boy, and so we can't simply say that one or the other is the real attitude. On the other hand, if he believes that what he says is his real attitude, then we must acknowledge that that is the one he is most likely to consciously live out.

Third student

The third student is one I haven't got a text for, but I'm sure most teachers, particularly those working in adult education, have seen texts she's written. This is the student who has genuinely become involved with, say, feminist issues. She has taken with great passion to critical analysis of the texts of her society, recognizing the ways in which the discourses out of which they're built have been shaping her thinking and limiting her for years. She is the model critical literacy student, with the rage of wanting to change the world burning in her. Why then, you may ask, is this student - let's call her Cathy - joining in this chorus of people singing the Smashing Pumpkins song? Her rage is unquestionable: what's the cage?

The cage is, of course, her whole life outside the walls of her critical literacy classroom. Cathy is the student that many of us have had: perhaps the one in the VCE evening class whose husband keeps on having other things to do on her class night, so she'll have to stay home with the kids; perhaps he has torn up her essay because he resents her going out to classes and becoming more independent. It is, of course, one thing to know that you are trapped, it's quite another to be able to do something about it. It's one thing to be able to mount a critique of patriarchal discourse, it's quite another when it is your family and friends speaking it, and you are committed to them, love them, and don't particularly want to alienate them. Practically speaking, what can Cathy do? We have given her the rage, and a very proper rage. What do we then expect: that she will go and prove herself a one-woman disruptive cell, shattering the complacent structures of suburban life? Surely not. We have given her the strategies to read the ways in which her society is positioning her; but we haven't given her the strategies to do something about that society. We have given her the knowledge of her cage, and that is certainly a necessary first step towards getting out of it, but we certainly haven't given her the key.

And of course, we, as teachers, probably can't. It is quite unreasonable to expect us to and I guess the only problem is if we have seemed to promise it. All we can do for Cathy is give her the sense that she need not be so trapped, and a desire to work in whatever way she can to improve her life. If we do a really good job, we might be able to give her a sense of how she can be strategic in developing a better life, perhaps in sharing her new perceptions with those around her, perhaps, in a few cases, by engaging in public pressure for change.

Actually, Cathy at least is aware of the difficulties of putting her theoretical knowledge into practice. Her friend Amy is a bigger worry. She thinks that simply doing feminist analysis of media representations is enough. She isn't joining in the chorus, because she thinks her rage has actually managed to dissolve the cage. It's very nice to think that the truth will make you free, but I'm afraid that knowledge of how society's discourses can position you in limited and limiting ways of thinking doesn't necessarily translate into liberation, although it can be a powerful first step. In fact, the ability to perform the intellectual manoeuvres can lock you more firmly into a constricted life if you complacently think that you are no longer subject to the imposition of unwanted views because you know better; if you think that you're only analysing what happens to other people.

Teacher of first student

Let us turn to look at the teachers of these three students. First of all, Jason's teacher. At one point, Jason writes:

> Talk about brave new world. Concentration camps for men? Brainwashing in school - except we've allready got that.

I know nothing about Jason's teacher, but one can certainly imagine from reading this sentence that she/he may be a feminist, may have had a run-in with Jason about his attitudes, and this is Jason throwing down the gauntlet, daring her/him to give him a bad mark so he can feel that he's being victimised because of what he believes. Any good teacher certainly won't get caught in the trap of giving in to this kind of thing, but how to handle it is difficult. Taking Jason himself through a critical analysis of what's wrong with his piece is scarcely going to work: he's simply going to say that he's got a right to his own opinion, which is always the argument trotted out when you come up against prejudice in the classroom. Besides, it will only give him evidence that the school system is trying to brainwash him. And of course, he's right. In one very real sense, it is. It is trying to change a very deep-seated belief about the natural supremacy of men. As Jason's teacher, in the end I would want to say that he doesn't have the right to this opinion, because it devalues more than half the human beings in the world. Certainly I would say that the opinion should not go uncontested, although I suspect I might not engage with Jason very far, beyond confirming that I did disagree with him. To try to engage in rational argument is probably to play his game, and will only confirm him in his attitudes. Besides, rational engagement rather misses the point, since these attitudes are not rationally based and will almost certainly not be shifted by reason.

Indeed, the sheer irrationality of the attitudes can at times be a very striking thing, as can the way in which the irrationality is basically impervious to any kind of critique. The following exchange comes from the research project you have already heard about in relation to Daniel. I specifically directed a question to one of the boys who had said he didn't like homosexuals:

Chris *I'd run (a homosexual) over if he walked across the road.*

RM *O.K. You'd run him over if he walked across the road. So you in fact would not want your ...*

C *(They're gutless.)*

RM *... a kid of yours to have a homosexual as a teacher?*

C *No, they'll learn filthy habits.*

Michele (inaudible, but clearly against the statement)

C *They will ... they will!*

(Chorus of comments.)

RM *No ... No ...*

M (inaudible, something about "walking across the road")

RM *Sorry. Can I ... can I, I mean, quite seriously ask what kind of habits you think they would learn? I ... I ...*

C *What happens if there was something going on in the bedroom and they walk in ... and they wanted to know what's going on?*

RM *But ...*

C *How are they going to teach children the right thing?*

S (overlapping) *... at school.*

C *At school, but when they get home and they see that they've got like two fathers.*

(General laughter)

S *But we're talking about teachers.*

M *They don't care (i.e. that they've got two fathers.)*

RM *No No No. I ... I was actually talking about teachers.*

C *Yeah? So?*

RM *But ... but the children do not see the teachers in bed, usually anyway. What ..*

C (inaudible) ... *You never know.*

RM *What?*

C *You never know!*

RM *Right ...*

At which point, I decided it was time to change the topic. The interesting thing, apart from the doggedness with which he asserted his viewpoint - and I didn't get the impression during the exchange, and one doesn't get the impression on the tape that he is feeling at all challenged by the logic against him - is the shift from discussing the homosexual as teacher to discussing the homosexual as parent, as getting the better of the argument seemed to demand it. It is what we would expect, as analyses of homophobic discourse have shown, particularly the brilliant work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. I actually won't quote Sedgwick here, but rather David Halperin in *Saint Foucault*, talking about the value of some of her work:

> The great virtue of Sedgwick's analysis is that it delivers lesbians and gay men from the temptation to play what is ultimately a mug's game of refuting the routine slanders and fantasies produced by the discourses of homophobia. The reason it is pointless to refute the lies of homophobia is not that they are difficult or impossible to refute - on the contrary, taken one at a time they are easily falsifiable ... - but that refuting them does nothing to impair the strategic functioning of discourses that operate precisely by deploying a series of mutually contradictory premises in such a way that any one of them can be substituted for any other, as different circumstances may require, without changing the final outcome of the argument. (Halperin 1995, pp. 37-38)

We are not talking about this happening at a very sophisticated level in this example, but it is recognisably the same process that we see. The homophobic attitude is basically an empty container into which various arguments can be poured as need demands, and it is so difficult to contest because the arguments are not to be judged logically. The basic attitude is seen as right, and if one argument is not producing the desired effect, then the opposite one will be tried. Homophobia is thus protean and virtually indestructible, at least by reason. This creates a problem for teachers, since logical argument is one of the few tools they have to work with. They can get their students to mount the proper arguments against it, even, as we saw with Daniel, get them to imagine themselves into the position of a gay person, but that doesn't necessarily turn around the attitude.

Getting back to Jason, I actually suspect that all one can do if you're his teacher is try to make him aware of the processes of prejudice by using other texts, perhaps briefly point out some of those processes in his own, register that you do not like his views and leave it at that. You might have got very angry with him, but the circumstances of student-teacher interaction, coupled with Jason's aggression, have very seriously limited you in what you can do.

Teacher of second student

You have probably got rather more hope if you're Daniel's teacher. Daniel certainly is a much more intelligent student, and one who recognizes logic when he sees it. However, as I said, his ability to mimic the discourse you want is, in fact, a very powerful protection against being able to shift his opinion The ease with which he can produce acceptable writing is perhaps even a sign of his contempt for the people who hold such beliefs. In fact, Daniel is not often going to engage in contests of belief with you, and when he does, he will understand the points you're making and remain impervious to them. There was an interesting comment just a bit after the exchange with Daniel I've already shown you. We were discussing generational differences in attitudes towards homosexuality:

Gina *It (homosexuality) wasn't so out in the open, whereas now it is.*

Sophie*Yeah.*

RM *Yeah.*

D *Sort of, now it's more or less shoved down your throat, and ... if you don't like homosexuals, then you're homophobic.*

RM *Yeah.*

D *That's why, you know, you can't say in an essay that you don't like homosexuals, because all of a sudden you're scared of them.*

It's actually a point I've made in an article (that I think we can safely assume Daniel hadn't read) that there is a danger in using the term "homophobic" loosely because it does import the kind of psychological explanation for the behaviour that he is protesting about. It's why I prefer the term "heterosexist", or at least would want to keep a distinction between "heterosexist" and "homophobic".

Daniel is really a very bright boy, and he knows the standard ways in which you are potentially constructing him, and he is either going to keep quiet and so keep his views intact, or he's not going to let you get away with the easy pop explanations of how such attitudes come into being.

Still, one can't help being a lot more optimistic for Daniel than for Jason. The very fact that he can internalise alternative ways of thinking and imaginatively project himself into them, must give one hope. Those attitudes are at least there in his repertoire, and they can be activated if called on. If the circumstances arise where it's needed, he will have the language, he will have the understanding to see what is going on. As I said before, one can't even say that the heterosexist stance is the most deeply-seated one in the consciousness: it is simply the one that he prefers to see himself as inhabiting. Perhaps, in the end, the best that a critical literacy teacher can hope for with most students, is that they can go some way towards turning a Jason into a Daniel, and give Daniel plenty of practice in rehearsing the ways of thinking and ways of seeing that we consider the better ones.

Teacher of third student

What about Cathy's teacher? I suspect that Cathy's teacher shares something of Cathy's frustrations, and the frustration that more can't be done for her. But, of course, a literacy teacher is not a social worker or a therapist (as much as it may seem like it sometimes). A critical literacy teacher certainly doesn't have the power to change single-handedly the social and cultural structures that are creating the problems, although committed critical literacy teachers often work at trying to do so. I don't think we should feel guilty for not having all the answers, as long as we don't pretend that we do. All that we can do is give some tools for clarifying the problems, for analysing the social and cultural processes through which particular ways of thinking are created, we can give the language for articulating points of view, we can give information at times about where people can go for more help and support. I think we can also give a kind of model of someone who has thought through their positions, and is willing to state what they believe, and defend it, even if also at times, as with Jason, you know when you need to affirm but not engage. I think we can create a community in the classroom that is conscious of the need to examine social positioning and put attitudes to scrutiny. We can give support in that way.

Modelling

As an example, perhaps a tangential one, I want to read you a section of a story by

Cameron Sharp. It's about how he was asked to give a speech at the Hamilton High School seventy-fifth anniversary ceremony as representative of the students of the seventies. The story is basically the speech he gives with comments on what he was feeling. It's presented as true, and it sounds like it happened. He builds the speech around the school motto, "I shall attain", and in the speech he comes out as gay, which seems rather to shock some of the good citizens and students of Hamilton. He talks about what it was like to be a closeted gay student at Hamilton in the seventies, scared and bitter and angry, and, as he says, he doesn't think it would be a lot better now. This is the end of the speech, although not quite of the whole story:

I know it's hot and a Friday but I'd like to add that it's actually great for me to be here. After all I've said, that might sound a bit odd but I came here today, more nervous than you can possibly imagine, for one reason. Years ago I sat in this hall, a very despairing young man who thought he was completely alone. If someone had stood up here on this stage and said to me, 'Hey it's okay. Just hang in there it'll all be okay,' then I would have been saved more pain and anguish than I care to remember.

I am here today because I am sitting out there in the hall. I could be your best mate, someone in the choir, the girl or boy who is sitting behind you in class. I could be anybody. And what you do with that idea will say a lot about what you are attaining here. If you leave this hall today and head out into that wider world unable to cope with the idea of there being people who are different to you, if you continue to shout 'poofter' and bash up kids because they're not as tough as you, then you're not attaining anything.

But if you can accept that people have a right to respect, to common decency and that thing I called humanity - well I think you get the point.

'I shall attain.' What I hope is that you strive to attain lives that let other people, in all their variety, teach you just how great it can be to be challenged. About how enjoyable it can be to think about things you've never thought about before. I hope there'll be a million opportunities to respect the variety that goes into making up our community and that you don't waste any of them. Because it's not about whether or not someone is a poofter or a leso.

It's about people. It's about you, me, him, her, them. Us.

Good luck. (Sharp 1996, pp. 92-93)

I, of course, want particularly to point to the bit about the difference it would have made had someone just been positive and supportive. I don't think it would have had to be a gay man, just anyone saying it's all right. Certainly a teacher showing up the distortions in thinking that produce homophobia and asserting the acceptability of homosexuality would have had a big impact, just as we imagined teaching about the way women were constricted helped Cathy. Sure, we're still rats in cages, but it helps.

One can't always do the big emotional revelation and affirmation like Cameron Sharp's - that's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity probably: there just aren't that many big revelations one can make about oneself - but I think in all our classes we can model ways of going about understanding society that lead to more careful decision-making about what beliefs to reject and what to accept. We can model the inclusiveness that rejects the exclusiveness of the Jasons; we can show our rage at times, but also our own awareness of the many, many cages we're caught in. We can show an intelligent commitment.

Conclusion

As I said at the beginning, I don't want to provide a critique of critical literacy, just try to define some of the limits that exist, to be realistic about it. Critical literacy is not a universal panacea, but teaching literacy in this critical mode seems to me simply necessary if we want to do more than just reproduce standard ways of thinking. It seems to me still our best chance to get out of some of those cages we inhabit.

Dr Ray Misson is Senior Lecturer in Language and Literacy Education and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne. He is Chairperson of the VCE English Examination Panel and convenor of the VCE English Text Selection Committee. He has written *A Brief Introduction to Literary Theory*, and is currently writing an introduction to narrative to be published by Australian Association of Teachers of English.

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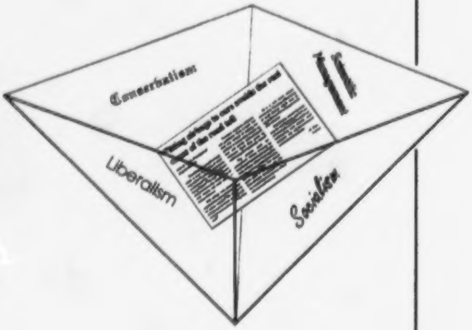

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